

CHAPTER 12

The Ballad of Beijing Gaol (1967-73)

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in the summer of 1966 I made two colossal blunders. The first was going abroad for a family holiday at the onset of one of the most momentous events in China's history. The second was returning to China during this tumultuous time when my presence could be exploited by misguided young revolutionaries to brand me as a spy and land me for years in China's top security gaol.

Our trip abroad was only our second family holiday out of China since Isabel and I arrived in 1947. So when we were offered paid home leave to Canada and Britain I jumped at it. As reports of China's Cultural Revolution reached us in the West we grew eager to return and take part in this earth-shaking movement in the land we had lived in for the last twenty years, where we had been involved in historic events: the land reform and the collectivization of agriculture, which we thought had ended feudalism¹ among hundreds of millions in the Chinese countryside. We had witnessed the setting up of the Chinese People's Republic, the sending of Chinese volunteers to Korea, the socialist transformation of industry and commerce. Now Mao Ze-dong had launched this Cultural Revolution. Of course we must go back and take part in it.

Isabel returned first with our three sons (aged 13, 15 and 17), in November 1966. I followed three months later after completing a hectic coast to coast speaking tour of Canada and U.S.A., striving to explain "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" of which I like the rest of the world understood precious little.

Back in Beijing we found our campus split into rival rebel groups. Which of them should we apply to join? As Mao had said: "No investigation, no right to speak". So we investigated. We had long talks with representatives of each of the three main groups, trying to find out what they stood for, and what they were against. Of course they were all, without exception, for the Thought of Mao Ze-dong, for revolutionizing society in general and education in particular. There was no argument about that. But what or whom were they against? That was what finally made up our minds.

Each rebel organization had its human "targets" to be aimed at and "knocked down" - that is, ousted.

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These were not simply the student leaders of opposing factions. Each faction had real or imaginary "backstage managers": experienced and influential Institute or Department officials - Party Secretaries, Bureau Heads and so on. These "backstage managers" were portrayed by leaders and followers of rival groups as vicious characters. They were said to have been guilty of evil deeds before and after liberation, before and after coming to work at the Institute. They were called counter-revolutionaries, collaborators with the Japanese, autocrats, elitists, bureaucrats, oppressors of worker and peasant students, revisionists and capitalist-roaders. And of course they were "opposed to the Thought of Mao Ze-dong."

We were astonished to learn that one of the big rebel organizations - the Rebel Regiment - had singled out as the backstage managers of the other big group - the Red Flag Battalion - several people whom we had known for 20 years as decent, honest, able and devoted comrades. And as its main target on the national level this same organization had picked on Foreign Minister Chen Yi, a staunch old revolutionary leader, who, in our view, was above suspicion. If they were against him and denounced our old and trusted friends - then we were against them. A simplistic solution? Perhaps. But there seemed to be nothing else to go by. And we were in a hurry. No more standing on the sidelines. That, stated simply is how we came to apply for membership in the Red Flag Battalion.

Our applications were carefully considered, for foreigners had in recent years been shut out from Chinese political life. But the Cultural Revolution was attacking, among other reactionary acts and ideas, this un-Marxist departure from internationalism. So we were soon accepted as supporters and later enrolled as members at a meeting of the several hundred members of Red Flag - along with half a dozen other foreign teacher applicants: French, Belgians, Americans and one from New Zealand. There were 9 of us altogether. We had left the sidelines at last. It was a great day. And the next 8 months (February to October, 1967) were great months for us - while they lasted.

I was 57 but plunged into the revolutionary tide with the youngsters and was carried along by it. But it wasn't clear to me why this revolution was called "cultural"; it struck me as political. For I felt Mao was right in stopping China from following in the Soviet Union's footsteps. (I had unquestioningly sided with China during the split of the early sixties, and had studied and agreed with the Chinese Communist Party's polemical

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pamphlets.) I was opposed to the widening gap in China between the working people and the bureaucrats; even though I enjoyed privileges as a foreigner and avoided giving a straight answer when asked how much I was paid (which is an acceptable topic of conversation in China) "Oh, quite a lot" I would say to the man repairing my bike, my salary of 190 yuan a month, being 5 or 6 times what he was getting. I hated the Confucian contempt for manual labour and the patronizing attitude of "unremoulded intellectuals", as well as the feudal hierarchy and protocol that went with it. Though generally supporting Party policy I refused to go along with Liu Shao-qi's formulation that Party members should be "docile tools" - not because it was a mixed metaphor but because it struck me as un-Marxist. According to the principles of democratic centralism I thought (and still do) a communist should speak his mind within the Party, when he disagreed with Party policy. If he was right, he'd help the Party correct itself; if wrong, the Party should reason with him and help him understand.

All in all I felt, whether it was cultural, political or social, I was for this revolution. So I went along on marches and demonstrations under the Red Flag Battalion's banners: denouncing the Soviet Union, supporting the Vietnamese, shouting slogans (though I never have felt comfortable with these orchestrated outbursts). On one occasion we marched to a nearby unit to denounce Tan Zhen-lin, once a worker, later a government Minister. He had joined Mao at the revolutionary base in the Jinggang Mountains in the '20s and I never could find out just why he needed to be denounced. Perhaps with ministerial position and power the former worker had turned bureaucrat; or perhaps he had supported the faction opposed to ours. But I was a disciplined member of Red Flag and went on the demonstration. I attended and occasionally spoke at meetings of the Battalion on campus and of its allies at other universities. I chorused with the rest (audiences ran to the thousands) quotes from the Little Red Book. These were recited at the beginning, the end and sometimes in the middle of meetings and were supposed to give guidance for solving problems or planning actions. The connection with these quotes sometimes called for imagination but the thought itself was usually profound. Occasionally I composed posters or made speeches defending Chen Yi, denouncing the use of force or upholding internationalism. I cheerfully joined in the singing of "When you're sailing the seas rely on the helmsman" (Mao) and equally cheerfully joined in the denunciation of Liu Shao-qi's "black book"², though I had previously been inspired by it and had recommended it to friends. Now I loyally condemned it. The climax of my public condemnation of the book involved my mother-in-law, a

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lady I have always admired. She had been a Christian missionary in China for 30 years and after reading Liu's book shortly before the Cultural Revolution, she had put it down with a sigh, saying, "Oh, if only we had a man like that to lead the United Church of Canada." "You see," I would say, while denouncing Liu "what sort of a communist book is that which is praised by an old Christian missionary."

Why did I, a middle-aged university teacher do all these things, without coolly investigating and analysing each case and considering what I should or should not do? I was carried along by the revolutionary storm, imbued with enthusiasm, discipline and modesty ("Who am I to have doubts about this world-shaking event launched and led by Mao Ze-dong?") My only reservation was: why did Mao's latest "Supreme Instructions" have to be blared forth over the loudspeaker at midnight and have to be followed by a march round the campus. I sometimes failed to turn out.

Many other foreigners were carried along too, and formed their own "Revolutionary Regiment" named Bethune-Yan'an, which was praised by Premier Zhou En-lai. Isabel and I joined Bethune-Yan'an as well as Red Flag, so we were kept doubly busy. But we felt the extra effort well worthwhile, not only because "B-Y" was international, with members and leaders from all the continents. It also gave us foreigners who chose not to remain neutral in the movement a legitimate and recognized place in the revolutionary upsurge.

Into all this we squeezed what family life we could. Our sons, each according to his temperament, played some part in the revolutionary goings on, with their Chinese schoolmates and in the Youth Section of Bethune-Yan'an. And over weekends whenever possible we kept up the family tradition of cycling to the Western Hills, an hour's ride away, to climb, to picnic and sometimes to swim.

October is late for outdoor swimming in Beijing, except for the city's small spartan breed of "ice-breakers", to which we do not belong. But Sunday, October 15, 1967, was exceptionally warm for that time of year, or we ourselves were warmed with revolutionary fervour. Anyway, on that day Isabel, our American friend Marcella Vance Ye and I, fortified before and after with a swig of Chinese white spirit plunged into the little reservoir in Cherry Valley, up beyond the temple of the Sleeping Buddha in the Western Hills. That was my last swim for years.

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Seized

The following Tuesday, October 17, 1967, in the middle of the morning I crossed over to the East Campus to pick up our mail from the Registry. On the sportsground there were little knots of students, little piles of bricks, there having been factional fighting the last couple of days. I had never become involved in this and felt invulnerable; so I strolled over to find out what was going on. Boy and girl students were on the roof of the classroom building which the Rebel Regiment had made its headquarters. Other students stood dangerously on the window-ledges of the third and fourth stories, one hand holding on, the other shielding the eyes, peering ahead like sailors in the crows' nest looking out to sea. What were they looking for? I had no idea, but it was very dramatic.

Down on the ground, just outside the building was a crowd of boys wearing hard hats. I'd heard of this strong-arm squad and went over for a close look at them. They advanced toward me, surrounded me, asked me aggressively for my camera. (There was a regulation against the photographing of posters³.) "I had none," I said. "You're lying. You're a foreign spy. What's in your briefcase? Come inside and be searched." I was hustled into the building and upstairs. My briefcase was taken away, my pockets emptied. But there was no brutality. After a couple of hours food was brought in from the canteen. I refused to eat, protesting they had no right to detain me. Later in the afternoon I was interrogated. Again, "where is your camera?" They picked up the two-inch stub of my pencil, with its three-inch metal cap, which I used to avoid wasting lead. It was examined for the hidden camera. When it got dark I was taken down to the ground floor. At the foot of the stairs I saw two young women teachers, whom I had once taught and been friendly with. They stared at me, lips curling into a sneer, eyes blazing with hate. I was amazed and horrified. Factionalism had turned friends into enemies. I was hustled into the back seat of a tiny old car, flanked by burly guards. It was a tight squeeze. The driver was a student. Few Chinese students, then as now, knew how to drive, but I had often marvelled at what they had learned during the cultural revolution: how to rig up and run their own little broadcasting stations to blare forth propaganda, day and night, making a bedlam of the campus; how to investigate the whole political life of their opponents' "backstage managers" (good for future historical research, I used to think.) Now, like the legendary criminal about to have his

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head cut off, who admired the steel of the executioner's axe, I admired the driver's skill.

As we approached the campus gate I thought of jumping up, seizing the wheel and steering the car into the ditch beside the road - in the hope that a crowd would collect and Red Flag supporters would come and rescue me. But with the brawny guards (there was a third one beside the driver) I thought better of it and in half an hour we had reached the Beijing Garrison Headquarters.

For an hour or more I was kept in a guardroom, while my captors went off, with my briefcase, to confer with garrison officers. The guard-room adjoined an office and I saw an old peasant from out of town come in, asking for help in locating his son, who had evidently run away to the capital to take part in the revolution. The duty officer made countless phone calls to locate the son and comfort the old man. Good, I thought. He serves the people as a PLA man should. At last my kidnappers came back with an officer, who said I'd be kept there overnight because my briefcase contained "ke yi de"(suspicious) material. Through ignoring the tone and stress of the term, I thought he'd said "ke yi de" (permissible) and couldn't grasp why I should be detained, knowing I had done nothing wrong. Actually my briefcase contained two of Mao's "latest instructions", which had been broadcast by the Red Flag and issued to its members but not published or broadcast over the official radio. Therefore they were not for the eyes or ears of ordinary people, let alone foreigners.⁴

Despite my protests I was led away to a cell, about 8 feet by 6, almost filled by a wide, low plank bed and leaving no room for the prisoner's traditional pacing back and forth. Asked if I had eaten, I said not since 7 a.m. It was now 10 p.m. and the guards agreed to give me a maize-flour muffin, then staple food of peasants - good fuel for heavy manual work. There was some discussion about this and they finally agreed to toast it "because of his age." I was glad of that. Even fresh from the steamer these corn muffins are heavy, cold they are like lead. I can savour the enjoyment of that muffin meal today. And so to bed, with one of the two thin blankets folded in four as a mattress, which did little to soften the hard planks. I naively waited for the lights to be turned out. They weren't. Meanwhile I slept - or tried to - with a sock over my eyes. The sock was no great help; I was too worried about my family's fears for my safety.

I was kept in that garrison prison a couple of days and nights. Occasionally I heard the clanking of chains of prisoners going up the aisle to the lavatory, but the only restriction on me was "only two pieces of toilet

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paper from the pile outside" - rough, brown grass paper it was, 4" by 3". I confess I cheated at times, but on the whole I was a law-abiding prisoner. Still, once I was barked at by an armed sentry patrolling the parapet outside, for looking out of the iron-barred window. One was supposed to turn the eyes of the mind inward and contemplate one's crimes, not pay attention to what went on outside. On the very first day I was called to the office at the hub of the wheel from which radiated spokes of aisles, all lined by cells. I was spoken to comfortingly by an elderly officer, who assured me if I'd done nothing wrong I had nothing to worry about. He meant it and also, I suspect, wanted to discourage me from thoughts of suicide.

At last I was taken out to a jeep-like vehicle - a "green Maria". Haha! I'll soon be home again, I thought. Illusion.

My next accommodation, a few miles across the city, was far better. It was the room of a battalion commander: Spartan but large, light and airy, with a tamped earth floor, a plank bed, a chair, and a string stretched a foot below the ceiling from which hung poster-size pictures of Mao Ze-dong; not one or two, but a dozen, almost identical. There was no craving for varied forms of art in those days. These quarters seemed delightful, especially after I received a suitcase, sent by Isabel through proper military channels, containing clothes. So Isabel was safe; and she was on the job! The food was good. Better than that of our school canteen.

But this prison paradise was soon lost. After a couple of weeks, in the dead of night, I was driven to the other side of Beijing. The new room was small, dirty and dark, lit by a 25 watt bulb. On the wall was a poster calling for the suppression of counter-revolutionaries. The door faced north and the floor was rough cement. It was cold. My spirits sank. Ever since I had been seized, until now I had felt sure: this is all some silly mistake. They'll soon find out who I am and let me out and I'll be back home with Isabel and our sons and comrades. But this wretched room and the threatening poster, the dim light, the draughty door, the thin straw mattress on the hard plank bed struck me like a body blow. The next day, in my diary I had to write: "No self-pity." And I thought bitterly, "All these years I've railed against privileged treatment for foreigners. Now I'm integrated with a vengeance!"

On my visits, under guard, to the toilet, 50 or 60 yards away, I found out where I was: in a courtyard of one-storey red brick buildings, typical of a commune center. Looking north from the toilet by day I could see the

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Tang dynasty pagoda by the canal, a couple of miles from home; looking east by night I could see the illuminated red star on top of the Military Museum. Having pinpointed my position I began to think of escaping through the lavatory window and running to the nearby compound of the Communist Party Liaison Committee for Relations with Foreign Countries. It was a hare-brained idea, the lavatory window being small and high, and the guard, waiting outside the lavatory door, would be only a few feet away. But what prisoner does not dream of escape? (Years later I found out that the friends at the liaison office, Chinese and foreign, who I thought would shelter me and secure my release, were themselves under attack.)

I was in this makeshift detention centre, which no casual passerby would have recognized as such, for 6 months. But after being there only a few days I was moved to a large, light room, with the window facing east and the door west. Before the move an unusual event occurred. The 9th Party Congress was in session and Lin Biao was to make the keynote speech. My guards, evidently thinking that this would soften up my counter-revolutionary ideology, wanted me to hear it; and as I was in the north room, round the corner from the others it was possible for me to do so without being seen by other detainees. In fact the guards went to some trouble to lengthen the line of the kitchen loudspeaker to bring it within easy earshot (though proximity did not overcome the difficulty of dealing with Lin Biao's strange delivery and thick Hunnanese accent). This action probably expressed what later became clear to me; the two teams of guards belonged to opposing political factions, one of which, evidently out of opposition to the other, harassed me, while the others treated me decently. The harassment was petty, consisting mainly of keeping me waiting 30 or 40 minutes before acceding to my requests to be escorted to the lavatory. There was some cursing, too, especially when I stuck a picture of Chairman Mao at the foot of my bed so I could see him when I lay down. "What the hell do you mean putting the portrait of our beloved leader down by your stinking feet." The other shift were sympathetic, praising me for my skill in making coal briquettes for the stove and allowing me to make a cardboard shade to throw the light down from the high ceiling (but not allowing me to fit it on, obviously for fear of my purposely electrocuting myself). I recall with gratitude an act of one of the "decent" faction of guards. He had a boil on his neck and when the dressing was coming unstuck he asked me to stick it on again. I was touched by this casual, comradely request. The other group would never have done such a thing, going out of their way to make clear that they regarded me as poison.

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Thus the days dragged on, unrelieved even by interrogation. Meanwhile I wrote letters home and also to the "Comrades in Charge of my Case". They were all in Chinese, but in the pinyin (romanized) alphabet, for I feared that in English they'd have been delayed or destroyed. Despite this precaution I received no reply. I was not only in solitary, but incommunicado. So I read books, including William Hinton's great work Fanshen, which Isabel had sent me along with the four volumes of Mao Ze-dong's Selected Works (in English) as well as a bi-lingual text of the Little Red Book of Mao quotations, Chinese on one side, English on the other. This was a great aid in learning to read Chinese; so was the little transistor radio which Isabel had sent from home. I would listen regularly to the "Three good old pieces"⁵, which were then broadcast at least twice a day. I would listen to the Chinese and read the English or the Chinese characters until, like millions of Chinese illiterates those days, I knew them by heart. The food was good; the same as that of my PLA guards, (one of whom was on duty in the room night and day); and over the Spring Festival or Lunar New Year, I, like them, had a feast. But solitary is solitary, and as dreams of escape faded I began imagining that my comrades of the Red Flag Battalion would march en masse to rescue me. This delightful illusion was mingled with fears for the safety of our sons. Maybe clear-thinking Carl, impetuous romantic Mike or gentle but gigantic Paul would protest too vigorously that I was innocent and provoke the Red Guards into beating them - perhaps to death. Isabel, of course, could cope. But suppose they seized her too? (Eventually they did and she was detained on the campus - not in our flat.) During one exercise period in the courtyard, I saw a suitcase airing in the sun. It looked like one of ours. Perhaps she was locked up in one of these rooms....

At last after 6 months I was called for, driven a few miles to an empty school building and interrogated. A middle-aged PLA officer, flanked by 4 or 5 others, and one young student, sat grimly at a long table. It was a warm day in April and the officer's sleeve was rolled up, revealing the scars of old wounds. A Korean War veteran, no doubt, a person I was willing to admire.

"Crook, what sort of person are you?"

"A communist," I replied⁶.

"That's a lie!" screamed the student.

The chief interrogator calmly continued with questions about my political history, how I came to China,

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what I'd done since, my actions during the cultural revolution. No charge was alleged but his questioning implied that I was a British agent. I answered truthfully and fully, filling in unasked background information which I thought might help. This was a man I could and must trust. I would tell him everything. At the end of the two-hour session he said sternly: "Crook, this afternoon you've been extremely dishonest. This attitude will do you no good. Go back and think about it. Next time tell the truth."

The pattern was repeated during another three interrogations spaced out over the remaining weeks of April, 1968 - each with exactly the same tag-line from the chief interrogator at the end of each session. "You've been extremely dishonest" etc. Each time I grew increasingly disillusioned in my Korean War hero. "There's no pleasing these people" I said to myself. "They won't believe the truth."

The May Day holiday approached, a great event in China, with parades, entertainments and, for old "foreign experts" like Isabel and me, a banquet in the Hall of the People, hosted by Party and government leaders. There was no reception in the Hall of the People for us that year. As the festive season came closer my hopes of release rose despite the grim interrogator's distrust. Then one night I was called out and hustled into a green Maria. "Don't move," barked the guard. "Clasp your hands behind your back." It was an uncomfortable ride of an hour or so, during which I tried unsuccessfully in the dark to chart our course. It ended, though I didn't know it at the time, at China's top security gaol, Qincheng.

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A High Class Gaol

The move obviously boded no good. But I was taken aback when the prison officer in the cell-like "reception room," before taking over my radio for safekeeping, said: "Better remove the batteries. They'll leak after you've been here a while." How long was he planning to entertain me? He had a bit of trouble opening the back of the radio to get the batteries out, so I obliged with a two-fen coin which I always used as a screw-driver. He looked doubtfully at the arch supports in my shoes (a possible weapon for self-inflicted wounds?) but I insisted they were vital for my general health, which was true enough. He passed my glasses, without which I could not read, after I'd implied that I was pretty well helpless without them. That was stretching a point, but reading, I foresaw would be a matter of life and death - or at least of sanity or madness - in gaol. And my gaolers certainly felt I had to be able to study Mao's Selected Works and the Little Red Book of quotations. But my Chinese-English dictionary was not allowed. It took 15 months of repeated requests to have it delivered though my suitcase containing it and the radio and most of my clothes was kept in the prison store-room. My induction concluded with a more symbolic item, my wedding ring. "Take that off and hand it over," I was ordered. I objected, explaining its significance. "That's a bit of feudal nonsense. Hand it over. We'll take care of it for you." I felt he had a point about the feudal origins of wedding rings. But during World War II, when Isabel and I were room hunting in London, more than once we had been turned away with a curt "no vacancies" after the landlady took a quick look at Isabel's ringless hand. We caught on and bought two cheap "utility rings" - 14 carat, the lowest grade of gold. If we had to submit to the primitive custom, at least we'd both do it, though usually it was only the woman who wore a wedding ring. I'd never taken mine off during our 25 years of married life, even though I sometimes thought it cramped my style with the Wrens in Colombo. Now it took much wrenching and twisting to get it off. That feudal relic had embedded itself in my flesh. But it came off at last and I've never worn it since nor has Isabel worn hers. We've managed well without them.

Formalities concluded, I was led out into the dark, marched a few hundred yards past prison buildings, then upstairs to a second story stone-floored cell. It was about 7 feet by 15, with a plank bed less than a foot high. That was the only furniture, except for the china lavatory bowl (unadorned by a wooden seat) and a wash-

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basin less than two handspans across. There was a window of two panes closing at the centre like cupboard doors, topped by a transom. This made a fair-sized window but it was all made of translucent not transparent glass. There was one massive metal-plated wooden door and another, inside it, of iron bars. Two hatches were set into the doors, about a foot by six inches. One was five feet above the ground, the other only six inches. Through this the prisoner received his food, squatting or kneeling. Why could the food not have been passed through the upper hatch, so that one could receive it standing on one's feet instead of crouching like a dog? (I thought of the communist General Ye Ting who painted a poem and a kennel door on the wall of his cell in his Guomintang prison in Chongqing. He would not pay the price of turning traitor to gain freedom, like a dog released from his kennel.) I learnt from my treatment later that humiliation was a calculated technique for breaking the spirit and securing confession.

The cell had been freshly whitewashed and lime had dripped down from the ceiling to coat the floor. This led to the only labour which relieved my time inside. I was given a pebble half the size of my fist (such a lethal weapon in the hands of a prisoner was surely a breach of prison regulations) and told to use it to scrape the lime off the floor. But lacking experience I found it hard work, for the lime had formed a tough crust and in places was millimetres thick. At last a sympathetic guard, a peasant lad no doubt, opened the hatch (the upper one, of course) and pityingly advised this ignorant intellectual to sprinkle water on the floor. That softened the lime and in a couple of days I'd scraped it all off; and the pebble was worn down from the size of half my fist to that of my thumbnail. The work relieved boredom and I'd done dirtier and harder jobs. I thought to myself: A Stone Age professor!

It was weeks or months before I was called out for another interrogation. Meanwhile I adjusted to prison life, to isolation, to lack of contact with family and society, to being without a radio or newspapers. I read Mao, covering the four volumes more than once during my time inside - and I still feel that it did me good. I did setting-up exercises, based on those of Radio Beijing, but modified to strengthen my back, which I'd strained a couple of years before, helping Isabel to carry her crippled mother up to our third floor flat. Just how much exercise did I do a day? I never knew until after my release, for my watch had been taken away. After my release, in possession of it again, I worked out that I'd done an hour and a half. But it was nearly all indoors. Hungering

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for nature I placed myself carefully so that, while doing crouching or squatting exercises, by craning my neck I could see out of the half open window transom. Then sometimes I could catch a glimpse of the moon, or of birds that perched on the opposite roof at dawn and dusk.

For nearly a year I had an "airing" only once every two months, for about three quarters of an hour each time. I was led out, neither seeing nor being seen by other prisoners, into an outdoor roofless cell, which seemed large because it stretched to heaven. What a treat it was to be out under "that little tent of blue that prisoners call the sky". From some of these open cells one could glimpse the branches of a tree. From others, by doing jumping exercises (I exercised non-stop throughout the whole airing) I could see the nearby hills and dreamt of escaping to them. What a hope! And who would have dared help a foreigner on the run? Wild flowers grew in some cells and one day I furtively picked a spray of three dandelions to remind me of our three sons. But I was barked at by a guard and forced to drop them. Next time I succeeded, though. The prison clothes I had been issued with had no pockets, but I hid the flowers up my sleeve. Back in my cell I furtively pressed them in the Little Red Book of Mao's Thoughts.

By now I was used to sleeping on the hard board bed, but having the lights on all night bothered me. There were two bulbs of different strength (or weakness) and at bedtime the brighter one was turned off and the dimmer one turned on and kept on all night. As at the makeshift garrison detention centre, the guards varied, from humane to spiteful. The latter resorted to petty harassment, such as keeping the brighter light on after bedtime. I dealt with this by provocatively reading in bed. That soon brought the dimmer lights. But then, each time he passed the door as he patrolled the corridor, the guard might rap on the door to prevent me from sleeping. How trivial all this must sound, especially in comparison with prison brutality in other countries, and with other prisons and other prisoners in China. This was China's top security prison, and foreign prisoners were given special protection by Premier Zhou En-lai. Nowadays Western friends say, "But you were in solitary and kept incommunicado for 5 years. How could you stand it and stay sane?" I recall visiting the Peter and Paul Fortress in Leningrad in 1958. There we were shown the cell of a Narodnik (Populist) prisoner released by the Bolsheviks in 1917 - after 40 years imprisonment. He came out perfectly sane we were told. As to the guards, even if they did sometimes address me as "Mr. Fascist", it was good that they hated fascism, though I couldn't help smugly

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thinking, "I was fighting fascism in Spain before you were born." And how would the much-admired Lei Feng⁷ have treated me? With proper proletarian hatred, no doubt. But one of the guards, towards the end of my term, must have been contaminated by "bourgeois humanitarianism"; in the dead of night he would open the outer wooden door a crack and through the bars chat with me, often asking about life in the West.

I tried, too, to put my plight in historical and political perspective. Why had I been framed while other foreigners were left free? (Later I learnt that several of my foreign friends were hauled in only a few months after me.)

The opposing rebel faction at the Institute, I reflected, had played the leading role in burning down the Chancellery of the British Embassy ostensibly as a reprisal against the arrest of Chinese journalists by the British authorities in Hong Kong. Actually the Red Guards were being manipulated by the gang of four in their power struggle against Zhou En-lai. Zhou and Mao himself denounced the burning, and the rebel organization began to lose mass support. To save itself from political bankruptcy it accused its opponents, with whom Isabel and I had sided, of harbouring British imperialist agents. I had been a junior intelligence officer in the R.A.F. during World War II - working against the Japanese air force. This was no secret. It was on the dust-cover of books Isabel and I had written. But in the heat of the revolutionary movement and under the manipulation of political schemers, the young red guards were in no mood for cool analysis or even elementary logic. They said I was a spy and that the organization which had accepted me as a member was at least criminally negligent if not actually a spy outfit. Framing me did actually for a time strengthen the political position of my accusers. Back in the earlier makeshift prison I had explained their motive in one of the letters I wrote "To the Comrades in Charge of My Case". Not only had they not replied; they never showed signs of having read it when questioning me.

I bitterly resented receiving no mail from home, having no visits or even phone-calls, seeing no films or television, hearing no radio, having no access to a library, for a long time seeing no newspapers. All these facilities, I'd been told were available in, Western prisons. How shocking to be without them! But then I would debate with myself and gain comfort from being spared the mass homosexual rape, third degree and even murder that often went along with the facilities.

Meanwhile there was the mundane matter of food. Isabel and I, with a number of friends had visited a

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gaol in the early 50's, on a Saturday afternoon Teachers' Trade Union excursion. We were told then, there had been complaints that prisoners were eating better than peasants. The complaint was considered just and the diet modified. I now reaped the benefit of this "listening to the voice of the people." Even today, Chinese diet remains low in protein compared with what I had been accustomed to. For the first year or more in prison (not during those luxurious garrison days) we got about a cubic centimetre of meat a week. What a feast those meat meals were, especially if the flesh was fat. That fat, which I previously disliked, now tasted as good as creamy butter. I couldn't bear to lose a morsel of the meat and wanted to pick my teeth, to ensure that nothing was wasted. But toothpicks were not provided in prison. So I extracted twigs from the broom and used them as a substitute. I had eaten well most of my life and now at times, usually in bed when I could not read, I dreamt of sumptuous meals, generally French: hors d'oeuvres variés, bouillabaisse (which I'd tasted only once in my life, in Perpignan, on the way to Spain in '36!) sole meunière, (which I wasn't sure how to spell), coq au vin (another once in my lifetime) and so on. Or sometimes I'd make it a heavy, Jewish meal, such as Grandma used to make: chopped liver, chicken gibleet soup, fried fish with potato pancakes, or roast chicken and baked potatoes, apple strudel. What more proof than these gluttonous dreams would my accusers have needed of the bourgeois ideology which led me into spying for the imperialists? But these flights of fancy food were one thing that the guards could not see through the peep-hole in the door.

Prisoners were kept under surveillance night and day. One thing the guards were especially on watch against was suicide. Escape was out of the question; but strict rules had clearly been laid down to prevent self-inflicted wounds and they were interpreted with ludicrous strictness. No metal or glass to cut yourself with - so no wristwatch or radio. Nothing in the nature of rope to hang yourself with - so no belt. That was fair enough; though as my pot-belly healthily disappeared on the slim prison diet, it became a problem to keep my trousers up. The absurd extreme was in the control of thread. Sewing was a weekend treat, involving the handing out of needle and cotton for mending one's clothes. This was an occupation I looked forward to, though threading the needle with my weak eyes in a poor light took time. (But time was what I had.) The thread was doled out in stingy strands and afterwards every unused inch had to be handed back. This, I inferred, was on the assumption that over the years short strands might be spun into long ropes with which to hang oneself. I myself thought

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about suicide only in general terms; I never actually considered killing myself, though I might have done if subjected to torture, which I was not. My closest approach to a death wish came when eventually I was allowed to see the daily paper. Then, reading of the death of some public figure known to be in trouble in the cultural revolution, I would think "So that poor bastard's out of all this mess!" But while my thoughts did not dwell on death as a way out for myself, I did sometimes think: "If only I'd taken that job I was offered at Leeds in 1960, I'd be in Yorkshire now, lecturing on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, instead of a victim of it." But then I'd acknowledge I couldn't have left China along with the Soviet experts not even for the sake of Haworth and Fountains Abbey and Ilkley Moor bar t'at. I felt committed to China, for all the frustrations of life in an alien land. For all its faults I loved it still. Escapism would have been more false than suicide. But my gaolers seemed obsessed with fear that prisoners might kill themselves. Why this obsession? Partly, no doubt, because throughout Chinese history suicide has been a form of protest against injustice. And it became more common than ever during the cultural revolution. More important perhaps was the issue of China's image in the eyes of the people at home and abroad. So while those suicidal weapons the needle and thread were in my hands the eye of the guard seemed always to be at the peephole.

Another metal implement we were occasionally entrusted with was the nail clipper. Cutting the nails like mending clothes was a pleasure to be sought as often and enjoyed as long as possible. I discovered to my surprise that the nails grow faster in hot weather than cold, like vegetation in a tropical as distinct from a frigid climate. Sometimes despite my repeated requests for clippers, they were not forthcoming for weeks and my nails grew as long as those of old Confucian scholars - who liked to demonstrate their divorce from manual labour. Apart from their distasteful association with feudalism I found the long nails extremely uncomfortable and during the summer pestered the guards for clippers. One of them, as a form of petty harassment, put off issuing them, until I said: "Of course if there's only one pair for the whole prison I must wait my turn." This I knew would touch the delicate spot of national dignity and sure enough the guard soon appeared with a boxful of clippers at the trapdoor, telling me to take one.

Clothes mending and nail clipping were a pleasant break in the monotony of prison routine. So was clothes washing which I looked forward to though at home I hardly washed a garment. Wash day was announced

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by the clanging of big aluminium basins resounding down the corridors and being thrust into cells. Two cakes of coarse yellow laundry soap were issued each month to wash oneself and one's clothes. How horrified I was at first by the niggardliness of the ration. Then I thought of how the peasants washed their clothes, with little or no soap at all, rinsing them in the streams then pounding them on flat rocks with a wooden club like a rolling-pin. I was entrusted with no such lethal weapon, not even a washboard. So I used the floor after sluicing it down. In spite of the crude equipment washing clothes was not an unpleasant chore. It called for little skill, save one tricky and intriguing task, which was the occasional washing of the cover of the padded quilt. This had to be unstitched, washed bit by bit in the basin, then, when dry, stitched on again, the whole operation involving hours of work. "Stitch, stitch, stitch." I thought of Thomas Hood as I sewed but I sang no song of the quilt. Music while you work was not for prison. "Keep your mind on your crimes and confess." That was the spirit that was called for.

Being deprived of newspapers was a more serious matter for a media maniac like me than the absence of song. What was going on in the world outside? How were the Vietnamese doing in their war of independence against the United States? I felt frustrated at not knowing.

About four months after entering prison I could hear the hatches being opened all down the corridor. Finally my turn came. Do you want to read the People's Daily everyday? I hesitated. It was in Chinese, of course, and I was disgracefully illiterate. Still, at least I might manage the headlines and could look at the pictures, though the P.D. is even less profusely illustrated than the London Financial Times. So I said yes. How much greater my misery would have been if I'd foolishly said no. The first issue arrived and after much linguistic labour I concluded that the Soviet Union had invaded some country. But which one? I couldn't make out the name and started guessing. The country had a long name - 6 Chinese characters; and two of them occurred in the Chinese rendering of my own name, Crook: Ke Lu Ke. I recognized two "ke's" in the country's name and at last worked it out as Jie Ke Si Lu Wei Ke - Czecho-Slovakia! Got it! That was the start of my Chinese newspaper reading. By the time I was released I could take the People's Daily in my stride, except for particularly literary or specialized articles. Editorials, predictably were the easiest. One could often guess what was coming next.

Teaching myself to read was both difficult and delightful. So delightful that I have often pitied my

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literate fellow prisoners, who had no such engrossing and challenging task to while away the time. Difficult because at first I did not have my dictionary, which was kept in my suitcase in the prison storeroom. Why? One reason, I think was that prisoners were meant to spend their time thinking about their evil deeds. On the other hand, of course, they had to read Mao, the People's Daily and, later Red Flag, the Party monthly magazine in order to remould their ideology and thus confess their crimes. I asked for my dictionary again and again but it took 15 months of pestering before I got it. Meanwhile I used my bi-lingual book of quotations to improve my reading. I would read a phrase or sentence in English and translate it mentally into Chinese, while looking at the Chinese characters and matching them up with my mental rendering. When at last the dictionary came, there arose the problem of reviewing the words I'd looked up each day. I would tear a piece of the precious, rationed toilet paper into narrow strips, use them as bookmarks and refer to the relevant page at the end of the day. But one page of the dictionary might contain dozens of characters, and at the end of the day how was I to remember which one I had looked up? I used one of my broomstick toothpicks to prick a hole in the page beside each character I looked up. By the time of my release the pages were in tatters and the book itself had, as the Chinese saying goes, been "read till the threads broke". I tried other methods of review, too. At one stage, for breakfast we had sorghum gruel. This left a residue of reddish liquid which I thought might be used as ink. (Pen and ink were normally prohibited, the steel nib and glass bottle evidently being regarded as possible suicide weapons, and issued only for confession writing, then taken away.) The sorghum however produced only almost invisible ink, so I tried using water as ink and a finger as pen to write in the dust on the floor. Through such efforts I learnt to read⁸.

As my skill increased, reading the People's Daily became more and more of a joy. I longed for its arrival each day and suffered when, now and then, I heard the terrible words: "No paper for you today." Why not? That day's paper must contain some item with a bearing on my case. Or there must be a reference to somebody I knew. A fellow prisoner perhaps. One day I read of the death of a friend, the American writer, Anna Louise Strong. I was always interested in death notices, whether I knew the deceased or not, thinking when in pessimistic mood: "Well, that lucky devil has shuffled off this mortal coil. He's well out of it all." But this particular notice was of special interest to me, not only because I had known Anna Louise, but because it announced that in 3 days there was to be a memorial meeting for her. I looked forward to that day's paper for it would report the presence or

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absence of other friends showing whether they were in or out of gaol. And precisely for that reason, when the day came round: "No paper for you today." The papers were not given to each prisoner on the day of issue. There was, I calculated, one copy for five prisoners and it was passed on from cell to cell day by day. I had also calculated that I was the third reader. So on the third day after reading the announcement of Anna Louise's death I worked it out that the fifth reader would have seen the issue in question and it was ready to be thrown away. I took a chance: "I read very slowly," I told the guard, "and I didn't manage to finish the issue of 3 days ago. Could I have it again?" Fortunately there was a different guard on duty from the one who had issued the paper I had wanted, and he obliged, no doubt admiring my zeal for the study of current events. So I was able to make out who was and was not among those present at the memorial meeting. But it was not easy, the Chinese trans-literation of foreign names being confusing. (Frank Coe, for example, coming out as Ke Fu Lan, the surname coming first). But this manoeuvre of mine was a triumph. Another little triumph was the mending of my specs. One day a small screw fell out of their frame. How would I manage to read without it? A frightening thought. I recalled one of J.B. Priestley's novels in which a character, after a drunken party, hunts blindly for his lost specs. Looking for one's glasses without one's glasses on is, Priestley shows, one of life's little ironies. But for me in gaol this was no laughing matter. I hunted and hunted and at last found the screw. But how could I get it in again, without wearing my glasses? And how make it fit fast enough without a screw-driver? I tore half a blank page out of the Little Red Book (sacilege!) and rolled the good, stiff paper into a tiny cylinder and used it as a screw-driver.

Reading helped to make life bearable, but my poor command of written Chinese was not the only thing that made it difficult. I had started to wear glasses for reading at the age of 50. Now I was nearing 60, and my eyes weren't what they used to be. On top of that, the windows were of frosted glass, translucent but not transparent. And they were seldom wide open. Except in summer only the transom window was open at an angle above the main panes, to let in a narrow shaft of direct light. How precious that band of light was! And how sensitive I was to the lengthening and shortening of the days and the dwindling of the light. I felt like a primitive man with his invocations to the gods at the time of the winter solstice, not to take the life-giving light away for ever. The opening and closing of the window, with the change of the seasons, was done by a guard commander.

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Towards winter he strode along the outside catwalk, closing transom after transom. Each time as I heard him approach I would shout out, asking him to leave it open a while longer, and sometimes he would, for an extra week or two. Once at the end of autumn I again appealed for an extension. "Make up your mind," the guard growled. "If it's left open now it'll stay open all winter." "O.K., leave it open," I said. Beijing winters are cold and the prison heating system, on for 2 hours in the morning and 2 at night, was not too hot, even by British standards. That winter, according to the People's Daily, the temperature once went down to 17 degrees below zero centigrade. At night I had to wear my full issue of cotton padded clothes underneath my quilt. But I was none the worse for it. The skin on the back of my hands did not split open into a red web of crisscross cracks as it had done during the first year when the amount of oil and fat in the food was at its lowest. And I had my extra shaft of light! Still, the electric bulb was too dim to allow me to read Chinese at night. That time I reserved for the works of Mao Ze-dong in English and to thinking and exercise.

When I tell friends how I read the four volumes of Mao's works from cover to cover three times (or was it four?) some of them assume that it must have been boring. It was not - partly because of the works themselves partly because of my own frame of mind, which responded to the social and political atmosphere before and after my imprisonment. In any case, Mao sustained me. All the more so after the interrogations began. For the Thought of Mao Ze-dong was the framework and standard of the whole process. Every act and idea was measured by that yardstick, by me and by my interrogators. Sometimes I defended myself with a quote from Mao - and was cursed for sullyng his name with my evil imperialist tongue.

So I reviewed my whole life, from the cradle to the cell, recalling and analyzing what I had done and what forces had shaped my conduct and my philosophy of life. I recalled, too, a story told us years before when we visited Yan'an, the communists' cave-capital during the war against Japan. The economy of the Liberated Area was backward, production was low and thrift and frugality essential. In the cave which had once been Mao's we were shown his old-fashioned oil lamp. And we were told: "He turned it up when he was writing, and down when he was thinking, to save oil." Now I would read what he had written by the light of that none to bright prison lamp, and think about it in bed. It was a solace and a stimulus to have an infallible standard. Mao and his works were the staff of life. Towards the end of my term I tore a page-size picture of him from the People's Daily

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(of which, by that time, there was a copy for each prisoner) and stuck it on the wall - with paste I made by chewing up a piece of steamed bread.

Such was the setting or routine of my imprisonment. The essence was interrogation. I find it hard to recall this in detail and sequence, perhaps because my memory has been blocked by psychological pain. The Chinese characters for interrogation suggest torture. And the ancient Chinese legal code insisted that a prisoner should not be pronounced guilty until he had confessed. So to make sure that he confessed, he was tortured. That aspect of the law had been officially repudiated in New China. But still, the aim of interrogating me was evidently not to find out whether I was guilty or innocent. The decision had, it was clear, already been made that I was guilty of being "an imperialist agent." The question was, would I admit it and "show repentance?" Time and time again my interrogators told me, what counted most was not my crime but my attitude towards it. If the prisoner showed repentance he would soon be released; if not, he must be "educated" and released later, if obstinately unrepentant, he must be punished. That was the theory, and up to a point, my interrogators put it into practice. But only up to a point. For there was an external factor: the ongoing struggle for political power by Lin Biao and the gang of four against Zhou En-lai. (Mao Ze-dong's position during these last years of his life was, to give him the benefit of the doubt, unclear.)

The timing of interrogations was irregular; there was no pattern. That I knew from my RAF training was correct intelligence procedure: never give the enemy a chance to forecast, plan, prepare, through knowing your routine. Suddenly one day I heard the click of leather boots (the regular guards wore rubber-soled shoes) coming along the corridor. The cell doors were unlocked. "Come along" I was escorted about 100 yards along the corridor. I was tense but not physically afraid, confident there would be no third degree. Rounding one corner, we entered a wood-panelled room twice the size of my cell. Half a dozen men sat behind a long table. Five steps in front of it was a red-painted drum, for me to sit on. I reckoned it would be hard to get hold of that drum and throw it at the interrogators. That was doubtless the reason for it. It was an uncomfortable seat and once, in the middle of a long session, I stretched out my legs. "Where do you think you are? At a reception?" barked an interrogator. "Don't you know Chairman Mao says 'A revolution is not a dinner party'? Sit up straight." And as a further attack on my "imperialist arrogance" and a reminder of the seriousness of my situation: "Look at the

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clothes you're wearing" I looked. They were prison issue, all black and a bit baggy, but decent. A new or newly quilted suit was issued every winter. The fact that they were prison clothes was expected to make me feel ashamed, to act as a spur to confession. But I was concerned about more material aspects of my incarceration than loss of face over the colour and cut of my clothes.

The composition of the board changed in the course of the years, but there was always one member who knew some English though the procedure was in Chinese. One of these English speakers was a student, now he is a teacher, in the same university as I. We are on friendly, though not intimate terms. The others I never knew. One was big and tall, with wavy hair and a gentle manner; in my mind I named him "the Tibetan." One was small, wiry and volatile. Though middle-aged, he wore shorts in the summer (not common for a person of his age and rank, in China). So I named him "Shorty". One struck me as an upper class intellectual, probably a "democratic personage" I guessed, getting some education in class struggle. Another, the one who had shouted at me, was the only one I disliked. Because of his sneering manner - he would laugh when he doubted the truth of what I said - I called him "Sneerer". The rest were serious and correct and I have often felt I would like to sit down with them over a drink and talk about those days when they in their way and I in mine were all victims of the cultural revolution. By and large they were pretty good people, I'd guess. I was not so broad-minded at the time. I thought they were either idiots lacking in logic or sycophants obeying orders without an iota of moral compunction. In short, fools or knaves.

Proceedings always opened with my being called on to read a couplet posted on the wall, from the works of Mao Ze-dong: "Lenience for those who confess, severity for those who resist." Then I was ordered to sit down on the drum and to tell my story. There was never any formal charge. The board took it for granted that I was guilty. They knew it and they "knew" that I knew it too. Guilty of what? Evidently of being an imperialist agent infiltrated into the ranks of the proletariat. They never said I was a spy. It was up to me to say that. I would gain merit by coming clean of my own accord, then I would receive the most lenient treatment. If my confession were to be drawn out of me by their devastating logic then I would gain less merit and would have to be dealt with more severely. They wanted to save me. Or rather they wanted me to save myself. So I had to volunteer my villainous story: How and why I had come to China in 1947. Who sent me: that is to say, who

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was my "spy-master". How I got into the Liberated Areas and how I got my intelligence out.

The truth was stranger than fiction and my interrogators could not, would not believe it.

Lining up at the RAF demobilization centre to get my discharge after World War II in 1946, I gleaned some interesting information. The chap ahead of me was talking to his neighbour in the queue about a certain "repatriation" King's Regulation. According to this, anyone who had come to Britain from abroad to enlist in the armed forces was eligible for free passage back to the country he had come from - at his Majesty's expense. This man himself had come from Burma and was applying for repatriation. Why shouldn't I apply for repatriation to China? Isabel had been born there and was interested in going back for further anthropological research (the repatriation arrangement covered dependents). So I put my name down, the option being open for a year from the date of application. This story, true as it was, my interrogators simply refused to believe; for going abroad from China is, to this day, an extremely complicated matter for Chinese citizens. And my interrogators constantly applied Chinese practice to British society. (Just as many Westerners apply their practice to Chinese society.) The mere fact of my going abroad at all - and on my own admission at British government expense - "proved" that I was a "British agent". Furthermore I had come with credentials from Reuters, "an organ of the British government" and The Times, "the mouthpiece of the British ruling class." I did in fact have such credentials. When I first applied for a visa to China, early in 1947, as a freelance journalist, the Chinese consulate in London - then under the Guomindang - had politely refused. "Of course, if you were accredited to some reputable newspaper..." the consul purred. So I circularised Fleet Street, stating that I was planning to go to the Communist-controlled Liberated Areas. To my surprise and delight I got positive responses from The Times and Reuters, taking me on as a stringer. I went back to the consulate. One glance at the two distinguished letter-heads was enough for the GMD consul. He gave me my visa with a smile. When we reached Tianjin the British Press Attaché undertook to forward my articles from the Liberated Areas to London. He received them from communist couriers disguised as traders.

I told all this to my interrogators. So not only had the British government sent me to China, but they transmitted my "intelligence"!

While the interrogators drew mechanical analogies between Chinese and British society and had a simplified idea of how the latter worked, they had done some homework. When I told them I had studied Chinese

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for 6 months on an ex-serviceman's educational grant at the School of Oriental and African Studies of London University, they knew all about that institution! It was an arm of the Foreign Office, a "spy school". They even asked me about MI6, which I'd never heard of; at that time, I'd heard only of MI5. My protestations of ignorance were further proof of my obstinacy. "Read those quotations again: 'Lenience for those who confess; severity for those who resist.'" To show how familiar they were with my doings they would let slip that they knew that a certain Englishman had visited me at 7.30 p.m. on the evening of such and such a date in 1957. True no doubt. The scope of their knowledge was meant to impress me, to convince me that it would be useless to hold anything back. I should tell all and obtain lenient treatment. I was not impressed, realizing that the source of such information came from the stubs of the forms that visitors, in those days, had to fill in at the Institute gate (as was done when visiting official buildings in wartime England).

Thus the interrogation dragged on, with endless variations but the same old theme: confess; while I repeated my true story and insisted on my innocence. The sessions were irregularly spaced and of irregular duration. The longest lasted 11 days, with morning, afternoon and evening sessions (only two on Sunday). Towards the end of the series I was developing an uncontrollable nervous twitch in my left eye. But still there was no third degree. Only once did Sneeter, the character whom I disliked, wave his fist within an inch of my nose and shout: "If it weren't for the teachings of our great leader Chairman Mao, we'd beat the hell out of you⁹."

Another strange threat was that if I didn't confess I'd be subjected to a public trial. I thought this might give me a chance to secure my release by exposing my frame-up, and viewed it as more of a promise than a threat. My interrogators saw things differently. They evidently visualized a mass meeting, with me on the platform, head forced down and arms forced up behind my back, in the "jet-plane" position, while the masses shouted: "Imperialist agent Crook, confess." Their picture of the scene was in fact more realistic than mine. It represented current cultural revolution procedure. Any attempt by the accused to defend himself would only have provoked manhandling, hair-pulling, pushing the head lower and the arms higher.

Sneeter once said: "You see, this is a very high class gaol," and he appreciatively tapped the panelling of the interrogation room. "There are two different ways of getting out of it. One, walking on your own two feet. The other, being carried out" (that is, as a corpse). "You'll never get out of here alive unless you confess." At that

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time I thought, "Well, my mother died when she was only 56. I'm more than that, so at least I'll have done better than she did." But I was terribly afraid of lifelong imprisonment and told them so. "Just take me out and shoot me," I said. They laughed and said that was just bravado, quoting Mao Ze-dong's: "Only thoroughgoing materialists (ie: true Marxists) are fearless." And I, of course, was steeped in rotten bourgeois ideology, so I must be afraid to die. Actually I was afraid - of living the rest of my life in that gaol. I was healthy and might well last another 20 or 30 years. I thought of the Czech Communist Julius Fuchik in the nazi torture chamber, cursing his parents for endowing him with such a strong constitution.

At last I said: "I'm not guilty, but I'm willing to make a false confession." "That would only be adding crime upon crime," they said. But I did make a false confession, in the hope of securing my release, then writing to Mao Ze-dong or Zhou En-lai with a retraction. I cooked up a story about how I'd gone to the Liberated Areas posing as a free-lance journalist and promising to send back intelligence. I had always stuck to two principles in telling my story and at the same time striving for release: first, interpret my personal shortcomings as "crimes" for which I repented; second, say nothing which might harm innocent people in China. I thought it did not matter if I said things which were discreditable, by my interrogators' standards, about people abroad so long as they were true. I applied these principles in my false confession.

But back in my cell I found I couldn't live with it. It was betrayal of myself and my friends and it would rob me of the support of my comrades. At the next interrogation I retracted my confession. Shorty nearly exploded. He smote the table in fury and threatened to put me in irons. But later, to his credit, he not only withdrew the threat but criticized himself for making it - to me "an imperialist agent." His threat, he acknowledged, went against Chairman Mao's instructions. He sincerely believed in Mao - as I did.

So it went on, from the first interrogation in the middle of 1968 until the last session before my release in January, 1973. All except one conformed to the pattern, ending with warnings to be honest next time.

The exception occurred towards the end of 1972, after Nixon's visit to China. It must have been around the New Year's holidays. I found myself facing not the usual interrogation board, but a group of young men whom I recognized as group leaders of the guards, equivalent to N.C.O.s. They were not, so far as I knew, of high enough rank to qualify as interrogators. They obviously didn't know the ropes, for instead of having me sit

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on the uncomfortable drum, they provided me with a chair, nothing fancy, just a plain wooden chair. But it had a back. And it could have been used as a weapon by a violent prisoner. But these people seemed not to regard me as a dangerous criminal. That suspicion was strengthened by the first question, "What do you think of Nixon's visit to China? What effect do you think it will have?" This was the sort of question I might have asked my students. I pondered and answered: although Nixon had a long record of anti-Communism, his steps towards normalizing Sino-U.S. relations were to his credit. There followed a seminar, with all taking part, and the N.C.O.'s indicating that they were interested in the reactions of a Westerner to an event which they themselves found puzzling, in the light of Sino-U.S. relations during previous decades. At last this delightful discussion came to an end and I found myself back in my cell. Apart from the normal grillings this was the only social life I'd had for years and I'd enjoyed it.

But what did it mean? Presumably the prison staff belonged to different factions and this lot, perhaps, had come to the conclusion that I, as well as other prisoners, were innocent; that we had been framed up and put inside as pawns in a political power ploy. That, of course, would have been true. In any case their action reflected a shift in the wind outside. I still don't know the full answer to this strange session.

There was one other positive aspect to the interrogations. Being all in Chinese they improved my command of the language. There were times when I couldn't understand and occasionally the member present who knew some English would interpret - or try to. More often the idea was painstakingly explained to me in Chinese. Back in my cell I would brush aside the absurd interrogation and focus on the serious matter of language study. I would review the new words I had learnt and add them to my vocabulary. Sometimes especially towards the end of my term, when the interrogators must have felt they had scraped the bottom of the barrel, and were merely killing time, they seemed to go out of their way to use proverbs and idioms¹⁰. One phrase caused trouble: lai pi gou. It was one of many uncomplimentary metaphors applied to me and I couldn't make out what it meant. It turned out to be "mangy dog". There were a couple of young students present, presumably for education in class struggle. They evidently did not know English and were amused by my efforts to work out the meaning of the phrase. When finally I got it, they and I together burst out laughing. The senior interrogators were furious. Proletarian Red Guards laughing together with the class enemy! The students never re-appeared. There were other

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occasions for laughter, but I took care never again to laugh in front of the board. But back in my cell, turning my back on the peephole so that the guard couldn't see, I gave vent to my amusement. Man must laugh, even in gaol. Isn't laughter one thing that distinguishes him from other animals?

One occasion on which I had to postpone laughter until back in my cell was: I was being asked about my association with the rebel organization, the Red Flag Battalion. I gave the background and then said: "So after that I joined Red Flag." "What do you mean 'joined'?" Red Flag is an organization of Chinese Red Guards. You didn't 'join' it, you wormed your way into it." I corrected my terminology. Some time later I was being questioned about my attendance at meetings of British Communists. Having learnt my lesson in language I carefully explained that I had 'wormed my way' into the study circle. "What do you mean 'wormed your way in'?" shouted my interrogator. "You joined it." The British study circle apparently, unlike the Chinese rebel organizations, was a nest of international spies -like me. So I must have been welcomed into it with open arms.

Interrogations were always followed by writing "material"; in other words supplying further details and making confessions in written form. This was both a treat and a torture. A treat in the sense of having pen and ink, which could be used surreptitiously for studying Chinese. Torture in the sense that I wanted to answer questions as fully and truthfully as possible. After all these were representatives of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in which I believed and which I must support. That was how I felt. But I lack the gift of total recall, and rack my brains as I would, I simply could not remember certain incidents I was asked about. Over the years it has become clear that my interrogators were playing off Isabel against me. During her just over three years' detention on the campus, she too was interrogated. And she remembered things that I did not - and vice versa. Discrepancies in our memories proved that we were both 'dishonest'. Most difficult to recall of course were the things that never happened; or those that Isabel had experienced or knew and I did not.

Still I always managed to write something. And the guards were always after me to hand back those dangerous weapons the pen and ink, as soon as I'd finished. But I strove to hang on to them. I thought of the Chartist Ernest Jones, who 120 years before, in prison in England, had secretly written a long poem on the flyleaf of his Bible (which took the place of my Mao's Selected Works), using as a quill a feather he had picked up in the prison yard and as ink, his own blood. Fooling the guards over the pen and ink provided other little triumphs. I

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assured them that even when I was not writing I was thinking so that I could make my confession fuller and deeper. Once, after pen and ink had been issued by one guard, another one came along with a second helping. I did not refuse it and kept it when the first issue had to be handed back. Thus I enjoyed the luxury of writing even when not under orders to write confessions.

What did I write and where did I write it? Inspired by Ernest Jones I wrote on the fly leaves of my Little Red Book of Quotations of Chairman Mao and of the volumes of his Selected Works. Not poems but plans and passing thoughts. While confined in that small cell, my mind ranged across the earth and the centuries. And I must have felt that one of these fine years I would walk out of that prison on my own two feet and that I would work again. Meanwhile there was time to kill and a brain as well as a body to exercise. I dabbled in translation, or re-translation, not being satisfied with the stiff style of the authorized version of Mao's works in English, but wanting one which did justice to his often racy, earthy and even poetic original.

Language was not my only concern. Influenced by the power and prevalence of the Little Red Book" in China, I wrote: "We need a book of quotations of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, on Britain. Then there were political speculations: "Are the independent African countries New Democratic?" I asked myself. "Or will they need violent revolutions to build socialism?"

Playing with words to get rid of the rigid rendering common in English translations and trying to retain the flavour of the Chinese was a fascinating pastime - and time, after all, is what has to be passed in prison. In passing it, my notes show I thought of many things, often inspired by my reading of the People's Daily. Some thoughts were as simple as "We need a mass movement to educate people in the superior food value of unpolished grain." Another noted "We need a Marxist Child's History of England, which would be more useful to Chinese students than Dickens' king-centred version. And A Red Treasury of English Verse to replace Palgrave's Golden Treasury." My incarceration in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat had not undermined my communist faith.

So my life passed for over 4 years.

Early in 1972 I was ordered to take up my bedding and walk. I was escorted out of the building and marched under escort hundreds of yards back to the innermost reaches of the vast compound. I had long heard

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noises of construction and guessed, correctly, that new prison buildings were going up. If Zhou En-lai's enemies have their way, I thought, People's China will become a great concentration camp like nazi Germany. Now as I trekked further and further into the interior I could see how much construction had been done. Finally we arrived at one of the old buildings. My heart sank. They must have decided to keep me here for life. But when supper arrived I was puzzled. We had sesame-twist steamed bread in place of the heavy maize muffins. And day by day the food improved. To go with our noodles we were offered raw garlic, which I had never dared touch since unsuspectingly chewing a whole pearl in Spain, 45 years before. Now nibbling cautiously I acquired the taste. One day a cook came into my cell and asked if I had any suggestions for improving the food. "No thanks," I replied, "I'm already eating as well as I did at home" (which was perhaps a slight exaggeration). Now we had more frequent showers (once or even twice a week), though on the way to the bathroom and in the shower cubicles we were, as always, strictly segregated and invisible from each other. We were also issued better quilts and allowed to sleep facing the wall, away from the light. Announcing this the guard commander said: "This is our Party's policy." It didn't sound like a new General Line to me, but it was welcome. I had always found facing the light irksome. Most welcome of all these changes in routine was the stepping up of our "airings." In 1968, when I was transferred to this prison, we had only one airing in two months. Then the frequency had increased little by little over the years. Now it shot up to five or even six times a week! What a joy!

Another enjoyable aspect of life - if there is such a thing as joy in gaol - was not a physical but a mental pleasure. This was reading in the People's Daily the speeches of China's chief delegate to the U.N. The People's Republic was represented by its Foreign Minister Qiao Guan-hua, who had a sharp mind and tongue, a quick wit, a savagely satirical style and a keen sense of humour, the butt of which were the super-powers. I silently split my sides over his brilliant speeches. And this laughter expressed my identification with China where, by freakish circumstances, I was now imprisoned.

At the same time the tone of the interrogations was becoming less harsh. Once or twice I was even told that the "material" I was writing showed that I had been "making more of an effort." This was high praise after the usual accusations that my protestations of innocence were "extremely dishonest." But it was still not an acknowledgment that I was writing the truth.

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The order to write "material" i.e. confessions - had normally been accompanied by instructions to go back to my cell and study some particular piece of Chairman Mao's Selected Works which, it was implied, had a bearing on my case or would help me analyze my "problem" and take the road of confession. Now the interrogators seemed to be running out of ideas (except, perhaps, a secret one, that I was after all innocent), and time and again they assigned the same one or two pieces. One was "Message Urging Du Yu-ming and Others to Surrender"¹¹, which read in part:

You are now at the end of your rope....How can you break through when the People's Liberation Army is all around?...For more than 10 days you have been surrounded ring upon ring and received blow upon blow, and your position has greatly shrunk....Order all your troops to lay down their arms and cease resistance. Our army will guarantee life and safety to you...This is your only way out. Think it over."

The constant repetition of these same assignments made me think that the interrogators were not really giving my "ideological remoulding" much creative thought; they were merely killing time. Perhaps, I speculated, the higher-ups had reached some tentative, favourable decision and had instructed my interrogators to mark time until the news could be broken to me. My suspicion was strengthened towards the end of May, 1972. I was informed that I was to be allowed to see Isabel and our sons! After more than four and a half years! What joy! I was given a shave, a painful process, for Chinese razors were not made for beards as tough as mine. Clothes were brought from my suitcase. The trousers hung loosely around my diminished girth. I was given strict instructions: "Don't try to communicate in any secret language." But I was given permission to speak in English, though I wasn't sure how well the boys would understand, Chinese being their first language. I never dreamt that Carl had by now taught himself to read Shakespeare or that Michael would amaze me with terms such as a priori, which had come into common use during the philosophical debates of the cultural revolution; or that Paul would puzzle me with Bangladesh, which I then knew only by its Chinese name.

The family did not come to see me; I was driven into Beijing to another prison to meet them. The drive itself was a treat, lasting three quarters of an hour. First we went past miles of fields, where farmers were busy working the land and there were long lines of carts on the country roads. A basket fell off the back of one, unnoticed by the driver. I excitedly pointed this out to the N.C.O. beside me in the car. He happened to be the

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exceptionally nasty one who had caught me trying to smuggle the spray of dandelions into my cell. "None of your business," he snapped. The car drove on and the basket was lost. I had felt sincere concern for the owner of the basket and also that my concern somehow showed that I was a decent human being not a criminal. But orders had doubtless been issued that the car was not to stop or in any way draw attention to its foreign occupant. In fact, I had been made to wear a surgeon's mask, which covered up my foreign face. Further on I saw a tractor and craned my neck to get a good look at it, having not seen such a thing for years. The N.C.O. shoved his elbow hard into my ribs. "Sit still. Mind your own business. Look straight ahead." That dig in the ribs was the nearest thing to a blow that I ever received - "thanks to the teaching of our great leader, Chairman Mao."

At last we arrived, after a thrilling drive through the city streets. I was ushered into a traditional, temple-like courtyard. There they were, all four of them! Isabel called my name, dashed down the "temple" steps, flung her arms around me and kissed me. I was overwhelmed - and somewhat embarrassed. Institutional life had not turned me into a vegetable, but in China husbands and wives did not kiss in public even after being separated for years by war and revolution. We were ushered into a meeting room, and seated at opposite sides of a board-room table, flanked by officials. Isabel was the same as ever, Even now, turned 70, nobody believes her age. As to the boys, they were no longer boys, but men, Carl and Mike with their "Marxian" beards then fashionable among men of their age -21 and 23. And Paul, whom I'd last seen at the age of 14, had shot up to close on his present six foot four. I'd have passed them by in the street, without recognizing them. Half way through our talk I had to ask to go to the toilet. On future visits I went there immediately on arrival, so as not to interrupt our precious talk: about Isabel's work at the school, which was resuming classes, and about the boys' jobs, first at the farm machinery plant nearby, later at the automobile spare parts factory where they worked for three years. The conversation was restrained, as it had to be in the presence of guards and officials. Still, it was far better than talking over the phone or through wire netting, as in American films. China after all is only a developing country, not a super-power! Her prisons lack such modern conveniences.

These joyful meetings took place every month or so, with only one interruption. One night I had a tooth-ache and asked for some pain-killer, but it was not forthcoming. Next morning thinking that exercise would stimulate the circulation and ease the pain, I carried on as usual with my daily dozens. The next thing I knew I

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was lying on my bed, being attended by the sad-eyed doctor. I had noticed his eyes, when he came round on routine inspection, and guessed that he must have been a humane man who found the prison scene painful. Apparently I had blacked out in the middle of an exercise, fallen forward and struck my bald pate on the edge of the bed, leaving a cut, which needed a sizeable dressing. As bad luck would have it I was due quite soon for a family meeting, but I had to miss it. The dressing might suggest that I was being beaten. Instead I visited the prison dentist, a most inadequate substitute!

Perhaps it was as compensation for the missed visit or as a gift for my 62nd birthday on August 14, 1972, that I was allowed to correspond with the family. This was the only correspondence we had during the almost five years since I was first seized, my letters written in Chinese (pinyin) during the first six months of my detention never having been delivered. Unfortunately I no longer have Isabel's birthday letter to me, but here is my reply, which she carefully preserved.

August 17, 1972

Dear Isabel, Carl, Michael and Paul,

It was a great joy to receive Isabel's letter for my birthday. I don't feel a bit like 62 and am good for at least another 20 years of work - for the revolution. I think of you four, too, especially on your birthdays....

The last visit gave me another boost, like the first, but I regretted afterwards that I'd snapped back a bit too hard at the boys at times. I can understand their feelings; I'm probably more impatient for my release than they are! But this morning I've again been assured that it won't be long. So the main thing is for you to buckle down to hard work and study and for me to study so that in future all five of us (not just four as at present) can be of some use to the construction of socialism and the revolution. Meanwhile we must pay attention not merely to what we get but to what we can give.

I'm re-reading the Marxist books you sent and from Marx, Engels and Lenin on Britain am selecting extracts for a book of "Quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin (perhaps also Stalin and Mao Ze-dong) on Britain." Practically finished - though of course it will need criticism and improvement by others later. I add footnotes for the boys as I read, explaining some of the literary and historical references.

My thoughts for the future are divided between England and China. I'd like to go back and integrate with the workers for the first time in my life, talk and write on the integration of the Thought of Mao Ze-dong and the working-class movement etc.; yet I'm full of ideas for teaching and material for the Institute. (After hearing from Isabel about her history and geography lectures at our last meeting, I thought of taking the world continent by continent, showing where English is spoken and why - i.e. relating it to the history of colonialism and imperialism). For the boys' sake I feel it would be best to go back, so that they can work in a country where they will not be conspicuous (physically) or receive special treatment, but can pass on some of their experience of life in socialist China and so contribute to the working class movement, while learning from it.

The treatment the boys receive brings tears - of gratitude and joy - to my eyes. Their projected trip sounds too good to be true. Dazhai is the most important village in the world

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and they should not cut their visit there too short, but make the most of it by working and living and studying with the commune members if possible not living and working with each other.

I'm asking the Court to return volumes II and III of Capital - too much higher mathematics etc. for me. Also Bill's (Hinton) book, Iron Oxen. It's excellent - much better than Fanshen I think - but it lacks emphasis on the Party's ideological and political work and prettifies UNRRA. If you can, please send me in exchange: (1) Marx-Engels Marxism (published by Moscow FLP); (2) The Great Tradition by Annette Rubinstein (I must also keep up my English); (3) Morton & Tate: History of the British Labour Movement (to tie in with my study of Marx, Engels & Lenin on Britain).

I hope the boys will use all their will-power to squeeze out time for study as well as work and play - all three are necessary. Now is the time when their brains are most receptive for learning - Marx and Engels acknowledge this. So no matter how busy or tired they are they should persist in studying Marxism and the Thought of Mao Ze-dong and other subjects in Chinese and English.

Best wishes to all our friends - Rose, Engsts, Adlers, Margaret and others. Thinking of Margaret's efforts to walk, I recall the many heroic efforts of other patients I've read about in the People Daily.

Love to you all,

David

Did the revolutionary tone reflect my true thinking at that time or was it laid on for the gaol censors? I believe it came from the heart. I have often reflected in recent years that the pressure of prison brought out the best in me and that the growing ease and comfort of life since then and the indulgence of age have brought a lower political demand on myself or even, in some sense, a moral laxity and decline.

Why had I "snapped back at the boys"? Presumably it was in response to their talk of wanting to leave China as soon as possible or perhaps their condemnation of my treatment or even of the cultural revolution.

A day or two after I had been moved into the new block, at the back of the prison compound, I was called before the board, not for interrogation but for information. "You are going to be set free. It won't be in a couple of days, but it won't be very long." It was, in fact, nearly a year. But during that time the strange Nixon seminar was conducted, the family meetings started, and I was allowed to receive books from home. At first I thought it safest to ask only for Marxist classics, but after a time I plucked up courage and asked for, and was granted a boon: Annette Rubinstein's Marxist critique and anthology of English literature, The Great Tradition from Shakespeare to Shaw. Isabel had given it to me for my 45th birthday in 1955 and I had read from cover to cover its thousand big pages. Now I read them at least twice more. I even learnt some of the poems by heart and

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recited them silently in bed after lights down (along with the Internationale which I'd learnt in Chinese from the People's Daily); Burns' "Scots Wha Hae Wi' Wallace Bled," and William Morris's "March of the Workers":

On we march then, we the workers, and the rumour that ye hear
Is the Blended sound of battle and deliv'rance drawing near;
For the hope of every creature, is the banner that we bear,
And the world is marching on.

Knowing now that I would soon be leaving prison, "walking on my own two feet, not carried out as a corpse," I made ambitious plans for the work I would do after my release. I was only 62 and in good health, and I vowed to make up in my remaining years for the time I'd lost in gaol. The planning was made easier by the fact that at this time I had my extra pen and ink, mistakenly issued by the guard. I worked out a system for simplifying the Chinese written language, still using the traditional characters but largely phonetic. I thought of compiling a new Little Red Book, with quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin and, yes, Stalin - on Britain. I made lists of books for our sons to read. For them I prescribed, among other works, Darwin's Origin of Species, Krupskaya's Memories of Lenin, John Reed's classic report on the Bolshevik Revolution, Ten Days that Shook the World, and Edgar Snow's classic on the Chinese Revolution, Red Star over China. For myself I made a list of books I had long wanted to read or read again. Eugene Sue's The Wandering Jew, Charlotte Bronte's Shirley and George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, Cobbett's Rural Rides and many more, especially Oscar Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol." And I began to think seriously of some day writing my autobiography.

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Release and Rehabilitation

While I was immersed in these post-release plans, on January 27, 1973, I was suddenly called to appear, for the last time, before the interrogation board. The verdict, or more accurately, the first of a series of verdicts on my case, was read to me in Chinese. It was a self-contradictory document. The first paragraph, after identifying me and referring to my having been "taken by the masses to the organs of Public Security," went on in an equivocal way to state that I admitted having done intelligence work - without saying for or against whom; (actually for the R.A.F. during World War II against the Japanese Air Force.) It then stated that I admitted sending out "intelligence" material from the Liberated Areas by way of the British Consulate in Tianjin. This material, in fact, was not intelligence, but feature articles I had submitted to the British press. And it was delivered to the Consulate by Chinese Communists posing as merchants. The second paragraph referred to me as a "Comrade Crook" ("Comrade Spy!") and expressed the hope that I would continue to make further contributions (emphasis added) to the friendship between the Chinese and British peoples - an odd activity for "an imperialist agent"!

I could not fully grasp the injustice and illogicality of the document when it was read to me in Chinese, and asked to read it before signing, as I was called on to do. As I was struggling through the written version I thought: 'To hell with it. I'll get out first and fight for a clear-cut and complete vindication after my release. I'll be in a better situation to struggle out there than in here.' Isabel, who was shown the verdict before I reached home, took a tougher line, saying she didn't want me home on such mealy-mouthed terms. She got me all the same.

Home! It should have been a deeply emotional experience. But the self-control I had exercised in order to stay sane during more than five years of solitary confinement could not quickly be shed and replaced by a display of exuberance. After a quarter of a century in China I was still British. Of course I felt joy in my heart, in the embrace of my wife, surrounded by three sons grown from boyhood to manhood, welcomed by friends unafraid to visit an ex-gaolbird not yet publicly rehabilitated. It was good once more to sit on a chair, not a drum; to engage in conversation other than interrogation; to sleep in a bed with the light out, unwatched by an eye at a peep-hole;

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and to eat good food which would soon swell my convict's wasp-waist to its pre-prison middle age spread. Another kind of happiness came in returning to the class room. That was another part of home and the students and my colleagues part of my extended family. Rejoining them was not only part of going home. It was part of my rehabilitation.

In cultural revolution China all those released were subject to social scrutiny. Were they really innocent, were they guilty but pardoned? Or had they been granted lenient treatment? Were they just out on probation? The acid test was, were they working? If they were, they were alright. I was back at work in a couple of days; and no ordinary work at that.

Twenty-five young scholars from all over China were soon to leave for a course of study in England and I was asked to give them a series of orientation lectures. My information on the current situation in Britain was not the most up-to-date! I had last been home in 1966, 7 years before. But I had a fair amount of background knowledge to impart. Certainly, my authority was not questioned, and considering that my students were young Chinese scholars about to enter the lion's den, the assignment was a mark of trust.

My next job showed similar confidence in me. I was to be one of the teachers of a refresher course for young teachers whose English had grown rusty during the last seven years of cultural revolution. Eleven of the thirteen teacher-students had supported the rebel organization whose leaders had hatched the plot to seize and frame me. One member of the class had actually been a member of the interrogation board in prison. So I expected this teaching assignment to be a tough one. Actually the class was co-operative. I finally found out why. Many of the teacher-students, though members of the rival faction, had themselves, at the height of the ultra-left trend, been criticized and accused of "crimes". Some of their relatives had even been driven to suicide. So by the time the class was formed the students were convinced I was no spy and sympathised with me over my imprisonment. Some had felt all along that I was innocent and that my frame-up was just a political ploy, that I was a pawn in a power game. And once classes began they respected me for taking on the job, teaching as well as I could and forming friendly relations with them, now my students. Some Chinese, teachers and others, who had been framed and persecuted during the cultural revolution now worked half-heartedly or not at all. Yet I, a foreigner, apparently bore no grudges. This attitude of theirs and mine, brought about goodwill on both sides. So, to my relief, the

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teaching and studying went off without a hitch.

On March 7, I was invited to go to the nearby Friendship Hotel. There I met friendly representatives from the Ministry of Public Security, who acknowledged receipt of the strongly-worded letters Isabel and I had sent, protesting the illogicality and injustice of the verdict I had signed in gaol. Now this original verdict was torn up and a new one issued. This document was not ideal but it was an improvement on the first. We were dissatisfied with its stating that I was "formerly" a teacher at the Foreign Languages Institute; that I had been taken by the masses...on the charge of committing offences against the law...and detained for examination according to law." All this gave an impression of legality such as had not prevailed during the upheaval of the cultural revolution. But it went on, more (though not wholly) satisfactorily, to state: "It is verified through investigation and interrogation that David Crook has not committed offences against the law. The Chinese Government now decides to release (him) as being not guilty." And again: "It is hoped that Comrade David Crook will go on to make more contributions to the friendship between the Chinese and British peoples." The document was stamped with the seal of the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China. We felt then that this revised version should have stated that so far from having committed offences, I was the victim of a frame-up after putting in two decades of honest work. But looking back now to the then prevailing political climate and the urgent need to end factionalism and establish unity, I feel that one could hardly have expected anything better. Actually, the verdict was revised, in 1979 and 1982, each document more positive than the last. The verdict of May 2, 1979 stated I had "done much good work for the Chinese people;" that it was "entirely untrue" that I had "committed crimes;" that I "should be thoroughly rehabilitated", etc. I felt it was a rare treat to be rehabilitated while one was still alive. The third verdict, of April 17, 1982 referred to my new status as Adviser to the Foreign Languages Institute; to "false charges;" to "trumped up accusations;" to the full rehabilitation of my spouse, Isabel; to the annulment of all previous verdicts and, something new: "This decision should be announced in public to the members of the unit to which he belongs." This was eventually done.

Only one day after my revised Public Security document was issued, an event took place which was perhaps the most moving in the lives of our whole family and that of many other foreign victims of frame-ups and persecutions during the cultural revolution.

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March 8, International Women's Day, has long been celebrated in the Chinese People's Republic with a reception for women at the Great Hall of the People. On these occasions speeches and refreshments are followed by a performance, generally by children, the little boys and girls playing parts befitting traditional gender roles. These performances had not won acclaim from feminists, such as Isabel, who sometimes stayed away from the celebrations. This year, however, she was tipped off to attend. The event was to be something special and husbands and sons were invited. Some months before March, 1973, Zhou En-lai, the Prime Minister, was pronounced by his doctors to be suffering not only from heart trouble but also cancer. From that time until his death on January 8, 1976, he conducted affairs of state from hospital. On March 8, 1973, however, he left hospital and presided over a reception for 800 people in the Hall of the People. Besides a small number of Party and Government leaders, including Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, there were 200 foreigners and Chinese spouses or children of foreigners. The remainder of the guests were leaders of the units where the foreigners worked, and a sprinkling of interpreters. Our family was among those present.

Zhou En-lai stood up. He looked frail but full of fire as he made a speech which, with the English translation, lasted some 25 minutes. He had a sheaf of notes in his hand, but never looked at them. He spoke from the heart. Yet when some days later we were able to check the notes taken by an American friend against the interpreter's script, we found the Premier had not departed from it.

In essence the speech, made "on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government" was a plea for internationalism and against suspicion of foreigners. Quoting Mao Ze-dong, Zhou said "a revolution is not a dinner party" and in the course of the cultural revolution there had inevitably been some mistakes, some sabotage and conspiracy, which had led to the wrong treatment of a number of foreigners, for which he now, on behalf of the Party and Government, apologized. He referred by name to a number of the foreign victims (all from English-speaking countries, though there were in fact many from other parts of the world). Some of them were present, others had gone home and the Premier now publicly invited them back to China, either on a visit or to resume their work. (A number of them accepted the invitation.) Referring to me he said: "Some cases were out-and-out misunderstandings" and later on: "Some of the masses thought there were grounds for being suspicious of him" (David Crook). But, he explained, certain counter-revolutionary individuals

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in the Party and Government and certain rebel organizations (all of whom he named) had been involved in framing me, adding: "David Crook is now free and we express our apologies to him" (as he did to other foreigners). At this time he turned to Zhang Han-zhi, who was sitting at his table. She was my former student and later colleague and personal friend of Isabel and myself. "Suppose two years ago David Crook had been released, would you have dared to speak to him?" the Premier asked. "No, you would not. If you had done you would have been accused of having illicit relations with foreigners." The foremost exponent of this suspicion of foreigners, Jiang Qing, Mao Ze-dong's wife, was then sitting at Zhou En-lai's table, doubtless on orders of the Party and Government. She was not amused.

After his speech Zhou made the rounds of all the 80 tables, followed by an entourage of Party and Government leaders - with the notable exception of Jiang Qing, who sat in her place, glowering. The Premier shook hands, chatted and had a symbolic drink with all those who had been imprisoned or otherwise persecuted. When he reached one table a young man introduced himself and his two younger sisters as children of the noted overseas Chinese scientist, Ye Zhu-bei. Ye was already dead, hastened to his grave by a means commonly practised by Lin Biao and the gang of four: withholding of urgently needed medical care. The scientist had been married to Marcella Vance Ye, an American teacher and writer, present with her children at the reception. The Premier nodded to the scientist's son and smiled. "So they took your girl friend away from you." They had. The young man had fallen in love with a Chinese fellow-worker at his factory; and her cautious and conservative parents, fearing entanglement with a suspect, half foreign family, had packed the girl off to her grandmother's village. Thanks to the Premier's concern the two were soon married. At another table he was introduced to the 11-year-old Eurasian grandson of a German university professor married to a Chinese. "Do they discriminate against you at school?" he asked. Addressed by the Premier, the child lost his tongue. "Well, if they do," said Zhou, "you must fight back." When he came to our table, I was as tongue-tied as the eleven-year-old and merely managed to mumble thanks. After making the rounds the Premier returned to his hospital bed.

The process continued throughout the years, in a series of revised verdicts on my case, each one more favourable than the last. There were also special occasions to express appreciation for the work Isabel and I had done. On November 1, 1977, to mark the 30th anniversary of our entering the Liberated Areas and the ensuing 30

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years of our work in New China, the President of the Institute gave a banquet for us, followed by laudatory speeches. Then, in 1980, Isabel and I were appointed by the Ministry of Education to be "Advisers to the Institute," a position equivalent in rank to that of a University President. On December 15, that year, a reception was held to mark Isabel's 70th and my 75th birthday. It was hosted by the Education Commission, the Foreign Experts' Bureau of the State Council and our own university. It was presided over by vice-premier Wan Li and other dignitaries, including Zhou Nan, Deputy Foreign Minister who had once been our student. The keynote address was delivered by Peng Pei-yun, then Deputy Minister of Education. In a society striving to build socialism on a base more feudal than bourgeois, protocol is of the essence. Our joint birthday party was an underlining of our rehabilitation.

In our thoughts and feelings, however, our vindication is expressed, above all, in our close relations with Chinese friends. Their name is legion.

This may explain why I am not one of "the wounded" or "scarred" - words now applied to a school of literature, dealing with and often written by victims of the cultural revolution. While in gaol, I was plagued by two frequent dreams. One was of walking alone in a maze of lanes flanked by high grey stone buildings, from which I could find no way out. The other was of a pack of puppies clawing at my chest. But they no longer recur. And I do not wake up screaming.

While in gaol I gave my interrogators credit for being sincere though misguided. I do so all the more now, years later, with better understanding of the forces at work in the cultural revolution. Now I believe that a verdict of guilty had been reached before I was seized. That was a prerequisite of the frame-up, which was concocted for political purposes, and was decided at a higher level than my interrogators. "Theirs not to reason why." Their job was simply to persuade me to confess - without the traditional use of torture - so that I might secure lenient treatment. This was also the rationale for not formulating any charge: I must know what "crimes" I had committed. I would gain merit by voluntarily confessing them rather than by being charged with them. They doubtless thought, too, that I might confess to "crimes" they knew nothing of. When I protested that I was guilty of no crime at all, I was told one day: "Of course you're guilty, Otherwise how could you be here in prison?" This was the logic of their position. I smiled wryly at it - once safely back in my cell with my back to the peephole.

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But to my interrogators their statement was no laughing matter. They knew that I must be guilty, even though they themselves were not in possession of the evidence. The higher-ups had told them so. There was the faith that moves mountains - and that rocked China for a decade.

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NOTES

1. The word "feudalism" is used to translate the Chinese fengjian zhidu which is similar to but not identical with Western feudalism.
2. How to be a Good Communist (translation), lectures delivered in Yan'an in 1939. (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1964)
3. A poster or placard written in large characters.
4. This security mania has historical roots. Under the emperors there were hundreds of categories of secrecy. Information was for the rulers not the people, above all not for foreigners. This obsession for secrecy is now weakening but is not yet done away with; it still obstructs the spread of information.
5. Three short essays or speeches by Mao Ze-dong: "In Memory of Norman Bethune" (1939); "Serve the People" (1944); and "The Foolish Old Man who Moved the Mountain" (1945).
6. I was not at the time a member of the Communist Party of Britain or of China (or any other country). I had belonged to the British C.P. before leaving for China in 1947, but from then on was not eligible for membership as I lived abroad. Similarly I was not eligible for the Chinese C.P. as I was not a Chinese citizen. However, I regarded myself as a communist and still do.
7. A young soldier of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, who died at the age of 23. He was taken as a national role model, especially of the youth, because of his modest selfless dedication to serving the people.
8. I foolishly failed to keep it up after my release and relapsed into near illiteracy as one does with a non-alphabetic script unless one keeps it up.
9. I learnt after my release that Chairman Mao had actually issued an order that "The fascist treatment of prisoners in gaol is to cease forthwith. And this order is to be read to all prisoners." It was never read to me.
10. These expressions intrigued me and served me well when, after my release, I worked with a team of Chinese teachers making a Chinese-English dictionary.
11. See Selected Works of Mao Ze-dong, Volume IV, (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1964)