

9

Our First Discussion

Next day, after classes, Mao Tse-tung again came to see me and said, "I like your essays very much and I'd like to keep them a few days longer. Would you like to go for a walk with me after dinner?" I agreed, and suggested that I wait for him in the common room. It was a very popular custom for students to take a walk after dinner.

First Normal was the only really modern construction in Changsha and people used to call it the "occidental building." It was surrounded by a wall, and outside the main gate was a road from which branched a number of lesser streets. There were several low hills behind the school which were known as the Miao Kao Feng. The city itself lay to the right, while to the left was a flight of some five hundred stone steps leading to the railway, and a little further on one came to the banks of the river Siang Kiang. The Siang Kiang is the longest river in Hunan Province and is navigated by a constant stream of boats of varying sizes. In the middle of the river is a long island on which thousands of orange trees have been planted, giving rise to the popular name Chu Chou, Orange Island. When the oranges were ripe, from a distance the isle looked like a golden-red cloud floating on the water. In the poems which Mao and I composed at this time, we often made reference to the "orange clouds" and the "orange-cloud isle." Three miles further on was Yao-lu Shan, quite a high mountain.

While some students preferred the excitement of the city, others chose to walk in the opposite direction in order to admire the beauty of nature: the river, the mountains, and the little clouds which seemed to float out from amongst the peaks. Often on Sundays some of us walked ten miles along the river banks to a place which was called the Hou Tze Shih, Monkey Rock, from the striking resemblance of an enormous gray rock to the figure of a monkey. We learned to judge distances quite accurately from the size of the monkey.

The scenery along the river banks was exquisitely beautiful and we were full of poetic ideas. I jotted down many verses in my diary and it is sad to think that all those old notes were, I understand,

destroyed by the Communists when they occupied my home. Little did they realize that a great many of these poems were written jointly with Mao Tse-tung and that there was also a collection of several hundred letters which he had written to me. I remember especially one large notebook on which he had inscribed a phrase which he was fond of using, *i chieh jui i*, "all in one." The Communists are said to have no time for old writings, which have always been regarded as treasures, and they have burned great quantities as waste paper. Even though they did not realize the value of the documents, there seems little excuse for this sheer vandalism.

I still remember the beginning of one of the poems Mao and I composed one day as we were strolling along the river bank. It was quite a common practice for two people to collaborate in the composition of poems in China, and, translated literally, it ran something like this:

Siao: *Clouds come out from between the mountain peaks,
Man returns from the river bank,
The clouds float along a thousand miles away.*

Mao: *Man observes the distant sails
While the evening sun casts its glow over the lonely village.*

Siao: *A bell tolls in the old temple
And the weary birds are returning to the deep forest.*

Mao: *A woman can be seen in the tall building. . . .*

I do not remember seeing the woman Mao mentioned and I do not recall what follows.

Mao Tse-tung and I were together at this school three and a half years, and our evening walks became a regular habit. However, it was not often that we wrote poems, since our greatest pleasure was in discussions, in hearing each other's opinions of things in general.(20)

Our first after-dinner discussion along the river bank lasted two hours. Mao started by saying he liked my essays. My Chinese-composition teacher, Wang Chin-an, a famous literary man, who came from the city of Ningsiang, had often remarked that my work reminded him of the writings of Ou-yang Hsui, one of the greatest literary figures of the Sung Dynasty. Mao, sincerely or as an intentional compliment, said he agreed with Wang's opinion; that Mr. Wang under-

stood me very well indeed. Even now, after forty years, I still remember both Wang's and Mao's words as if they had been spoken only yesterday.

I had loaned Mao two exercise books which contained more than twenty essays. The title of the first was, "Comments on Fan Chung-yen's inscription on Yen Kuang's tomb." Mao's ideas of this particular inscription, which is recorded as a piece of classic literature, differed from those I had expressed in my essay and we spent the whole evening discussing our divergent points of view. The story of Yen Kuang is as follows:

Kuang Wu Huang Ti, one of the greatest emperors of the Han Dynasty, ruled for thirty-three years (A.D. 25-57). He had, before assuming his high office, been known as Liu Shiu and had maintained a very intimate friendship with the scholar, Yen Kuang, who was also a high official. When Liu Shiu became Emperor he invited Yen Kuang to help him govern the country. Yen Kuang arrived in the capital and slept in the same bed with his imperial friend. As proof of their extreme intimacy, it is told that during the night, he unconsciously placed his feet on the sacred body of the Emperor. Kuang Wu Huang Ti asked Yen Kuang to be his Prime Minister. When he saw that his friend hesitated, he even offered him power and authority equal to his own. But Yen Kuang did not want to lead a political life. He considered it a base profession and was quite sure that if he accepted his friend's proposal, no one would believe that his purpose was entirely honest and altruistic. Therefore, he refused.

Kuang Wu Huang Ti begged him again and again, but he could not alter Yen Kuang's decision. He left the capital, located at Lo Yang at that time, now in the province of Honan, and returned to Fu Ch'un in the mountains of Chekiang Province. There he lived a quiet and retired life, spending much of his time fishing in the river. To this day, there is a part of the Fu Ch'un River known as Yen Ling Nai, in commemoration of the fact that it was one of his favorite spots. He died when he was forty years old, but his action became legendary. During the Sung Dynasty, a temple was built in his honor and the Prime Minister, Fan Chung-yen, an important literary figure of the day, was invited to write the dedication. This latter became very famous and was in time included in all literature classes as a "selected

passage." It was common practice for Chinese composition teachers to require their students to write an essay on their impressions after reading the story of the two famous friends of the Han Dynasty, and it was such an essay that appeared on the first page of one of the exercise books which I had loaned to Mao Tse-tung.

Fan Chung-yen's dedication contained only two hundred nineteen words, and the theme was his admiration for both the Emperor Kuang Wu and for his friend Yen Kuang. Both demonstrated unusually high qualities, the Emperor in respecting the wisdom of the sage, and Yen Kuang in refusing to be tempted by the offer of power and worldly vanity.

When I read this dedication, I did not agree with Fan Chung-yen. I explained in my essay that I believed the Emperor had merely asked his friend to help him in his difficult task and that the request should not necessarily be interpreted as homage to superior wisdom. Nor did I think Yen Kuang's purity was so great as we had been given to understand. If he knew he was not accepting the invitation to become Prime Minister, why did he visit the Emperor and sleep with him? Was not that action an expression of his vanity?

Mao Tse-tung held a different opinion. He thought when Liu Shiu was made Emperor, that Yan Kuang should have become Prime Minister as Chang Liang, a friend of Emperor Kao Tzu, who had lived two hundred years earlier in the same dynasty (206-195 B.C.). I contended, "It is clear that you fail to grasp Yen Kuang's point of view."

We had a long discussion and finally I said, "If Yen Kuang could hear your ideas, he would say you were despicable." I spoke the words so sharply that Mao was embarrassed and blushed; so I tried to joke to put an end to the discussion, "All right," I said, "if you become Emperor one day, you will see that you will not invite me to go and sleep with you in the same bed, and put my feet on your body!"