honor instead of as a memorial service for the dead. After the service was over, Mr. Wang took my hand and we went out together first, followed by the Principal. I felt as if I had just received a greatly coveted diploma in literature.

"As you can imagine, I have had no further trouble with those older students," I concluded. "They all treat me with great respect, bowing to me whenever we happen to meet, either in the school or out on the street. They are so quiet in the classroom, it's just like being in the church!"

Mao thought quietly for a moment and then he spoke, "I can understand how difficult it must be for the student to believe everything the teacher says. But it is vitally important for the teacher to create confidence in his students."

Time passed rapidly and soon my first semester of teaching came to a close. One day I met Mr. Wang, Mao Tse-tung's uncle, who asked me if I was happy in the Hsiu Yeh School. I told him that though I was quite happy in my work, I was also very tired, and that I had not yet decided if I wanted to continue teaching the next year. He told me the Ch'u Yi School needed a good teacher, and he invited me to accept the post there. I thought it over for a time and, since the Ch'u Yi was a school of excellent standing, I decided to accept the position.

# 18

## *The Beggar Life*

In January of 1916 I started teaching at the Ch'u Yi School. The next year when the time came for the summer vacation of almost three months, I felt that I needed a change. So I decided to spend the summer as a beggar.

The attraction of the beggar's life for me was the ability to overcome physical and psychological difficulties inherent in living outside the accepted pale of society. In China and in the East generally from time immemorial, begging has been considered a profession, rather than, as in the West, a mark of poverty or improvidence. It is fascinating to try travel about the country without a cent in one's pocket.

At this particular time Mao was still a student in the First Normal, but he came often to see me and to chat.

One day he said, "Summer vacation is drawing near. When do you finish your classes?"

"We're having examinations now and vacation will start in a week," I replied.

"Ours will start in a fortnight," Mao added.

"Will you spend your summer at the school again as you did last year?" I asked.

"I haven't decided what I'll do this summer," Mao answered. "What are you going to do?"

"I have a new plan for this summer," I told him. "I have decided that I'm going to try being a beggar."

"A beggar? What do you mean by that? I don't understand. Why do you want to be a beggar?" He shot the questions at me incredulously.

"Yes, I shall be a beggar. I shall go a long way away without taking a cent with me and I shall beg for my food and lodging. All the same I expect to have a most interesting holiday and visit many interesting places!" I explained.

"I still don't understand," Mao continued. "If you don't find anyone to ask, or if people don't want to give you anything, how are you going to get along? You won't like going hungry."

"Ah, that's the most interesting part," I explained. "I want to find how people react toward me. Do you really think beggars starve to death?"

"No, that's true. You don't hear of them starving."

"Not only that, but they are the freest and the happiest men alive! Remember the saying, 'After three years of life as a beggar, one would not accept even a post as mandarin'? Now tell me why do you think they say that?"

"Why, that's because an officer has responsibility while a beggar has none," Mao replied.

"No, not only that," I explained. "An officer is tied down by restrictions and a beggar is completely free. I have experienced the happiness and complete freedom of the beggar's life. Do you know what it feels like?"

"No, but I can imagine it just as you do."

"But, I am not imagining. I have really lived the life of a beggar," I said.

"You mean you have actually been a beggar?"

"Yes, of course. You didn't know about that, did you? I have never told you about that episode in my life."

"Please," said Mao, "tell me that story. It must be very interesting."

"It was four or five years ago and I was a beggar on two different occasions. I had been meditating on the freedom and happiness of beggars and I decided I'd like to give their way of life a practical trial. The first time I was a beggar for only one day, but the second time it was three days.

"The first time I set off early in the morning and walked out into the country till I felt hungry, when I began to beg for food. At the first house they didn't give me enough; so I went to a second. There the food was dirty; so I went to a third place where I was allowed to eat as much as I wanted. After that I walked back home. In the evening I was hungry again and I begged for some rice. Finally I arrived home by the light of the moon."

"But when people saw you, did they really take you for a beggar?" asked Mao.

"It was interesting to observe their reactions. Some people were cold and would have nothing to do with me. Others asked if I could read. Apparently they suspected that I was a *sung tzu hsien sheng* (an intellectual beggar who gave symbolical gifts of a verse on a cheap scroll, composed and written by himself, in exchange for food, lodging or money). However, I simply said I had no money, that I was hungry and had nothing to eat. Some were quite sympathetic, chatting with me as I ate. In one house I was given a whole bowl of rice, vegetables and a fried egg. The head of that household was an old lady who had two sons studying in the city. She asked me several times how it was that I was so poor that I had to beg. I had a very interesting talk with her and gained further insight into the psychology of society."

"That is really very interesting. What a pity you had only one day," Mao said.

"Yes, that's why I did go out again for three days. This time it was more difficult because I had to find a place to sleep."

"But how could you beg for a place to stay overnight?" asked Mao.

"Why not? Let me tell you. It was summertime, not too cold at night, and there was a moon. It was a wonderful experience. Walking slowly alone across the deserted countryside I seemed to be the only person in the world—walking in a void, no obstacles, no worries, completely free. Far behind and forgotten were the noise and bustle of everyday life, with only the stars and the moon in their blue velvet setting for companions. I had never before experienced such a sensation of peace and separation and I decided to walk all night. When dawn came, I lay down on a grassy bank and slept soundly till noon. Then I got up to beg for food. The second night was dark and somber without a moon. Before long I came to a high mountain and as I walked along beneath it, I saw a huge rock, blacker even than the sky, jutting out above me. Deep shadows and strange shapes were beginning to frighten me and I wasn't happy as I had been the previous night."

"But weren't you afraid of the tigers and other wild animals that live in the mountains?" asked Mao.

"To tell the truth, I began to recall all the stories I'd ever heard of mountain tigers and I imagined that there were tigers really prowling around in search of prey. As I stood there hesitating about whether to go on or turn back, I saw a point of light in the distance and I set out toward it. The light from a lamp was shining from the window of a small farmhouse. This indication of the presence of other human beings was most reassuring and I hastened forward. A few moments after I knocked on the door, I saw through a wide crack a young girl of seventeen approaching, carrying a small lamp in her hand. She peered out at me without opening the door and asked what I wanted. I told her I was a beggar who had lost the road and was looking for a place to pass the night. She stared at me a moment, then turned and went back into the house. I realized that she was afraid to open the door to a stranger and had gone to call her father. Soon an old man appeared, carrying the lamp, and asked who I was, where I came from, and was I alone or did I have a companion? My reply seemed satisfactory and he let me in. We entered a large room and he held the lamp high while he studied me carefully from head to foot. I looked at him in the same manner. He was obviously a farmer, about fifty years old and had almost no hair save for a straggly little moustache. He smiled

gently and I knew then that he had decided that I was not dangerous. I turned to look at the girl who stood by the table. Her hair was tied at the back into a long pigtail and she wore a blue cotton dress with trousers of the same material. From her sunburned, almost swarthy complexion it was easy to see that she worked on the farm, but her eyes were large and bright and her teeth were white and even. She was watching me and our eyes met for a moment.

"Turning to her father, she asked, 'Papa, have you asked if he wants something to eat?' I said I had not eaten but that I was not hungry. The girl, without comment, quickly left the room while her father and I continued our talk. Soon she returned and smiling, handed me a cup of tea. 'The rice will soon be ready,' she said. The farmer asked about my family and why I was a beggar; so I told him I was studying in a school. He told me his wife had died the previous year and he had only the one daughter. They worked the land together for a living. When the daughter brought me a bowl of rice and vegetable, her father said, 'Daughter, this young man is no beggar; he's a student.' She smiled and said 'Master Siao, please eat your supper.' We all talked as I ate, after which we all went to bed. I was extremely tired and they were in the habit of going to bed early.

"Next morning everyone was up at daybreak and I wanted to say 'goodbye' and be on my way, but they begged me to stay. Finally, after I had eaten lunch with them, I thanked them for their kindness and set off toward home. We still keep up our friendship."

"Ah," exclaimed Mao, "now I know why you're so interested in living a beggar's life! You still want to see the farmer and his daughter!"

"Last winter I did go to see them on my way home," I explained. "I took them a few gifts. The daughter was married and had a baby two years old and the father was living with them. This time I want to take a new road. I want to see new things and have all new experiences. The most interesting aspect is the overcoming of difficulties and there is nothing more difficult than trying to live in the society of others without money. I want to see how I can overcome that difficulty."

Mao was enthusiastic. "It sounds very interesting. May I go with you?" he asked.

"Of course, if you like. The beggar life is really for only one person and for never more than two. But the two of us should get along very well."

"Good! I do want to go with you. When do we start?"(25)

"My summer vacation begins next week but I shall wait a week till you are free and then we can decide definitely on the date and complete the details."

# 19
## *Two Beggars Set Off*

The date was finally fixed and since the idea was mine, it was decided that we would start out from Ch'u Yi School where I lived. Mao arrived early in the morning on a beautiful summer day. He wore his old school clothes which consisted of white shorts and tunic, both very old and worn. Being a teacher, I wore the traditional long robe in the school; but for this occasion I had changed into a coarse old jacket, shorts and cloth shoes. Mao always shaved his head, soldier fashion; so the day before I had done likewise. My disguise was thus complete.

Mao had brought an old umbrella and a cloth bundle containing a change of clothes, a towel, notebook, writing brush and the ink box. The less we carried the lighter we could walk; so we had agreed to take nothing more with us. I had bought an umbrella and my bundle was the same as Mao's with the addition of some stationery and a rhyme book, just in case I was inspired to write a poem.

I had left my money with the school manager and now I put the loose coins from my pocket into my desk. Neither of us was to take a cent on the journey, nothing but the umbrella and a bundle of clothes.

When we were all ready, I said, "Please wait for just a moment. I want to go and see the Director and tell him good-bye."

When the Director's servant saw me, he opened his eyes wide, staring at the old, worn out garments which I wore. He hesitated, apparently wondering what to say. Finally he asked, "Mr. Siao, what is