

the most degrading profession that exists! Can you tell me of just one person who has been successful in politics who can still be regarded as basically honest? No. Take Ch'in Shih Huang. Han Kao Ts'u, T'ang T'ai Tsung, Sung T'ai Tsu, Chen Ch'i Szu Han, Chu Yüan-chang, and others; were any of these good, honest men? No. From the most ancient times in China, those who have worshiped power have been mean in spirit. The two things seem to go hand in hand. To struggle for a high position by the use of force indicates meanness of spirit."

I knew quite well that Mao Tse-tung would not wish to continue the argument further lest I might criticize him directly. We both knew that he was identifying himself with Liu Pang in his ambition and I knew that he would not admit that he was himself *hsiao jen*, mean of spirit.

## 29

### *Difficulties in a Distant City*

After we left the Liu Pang Temple, we took things easier than we had before. We paid more attention to our discussions than to the speed of our progress; so it took us several days to reach Anhwa City, the district capital. On entering this city, we really felt that we were a long way from home. The people spoke with a different accent; their habits were strange to us; and it really seemed as if we were in a foreign country.

Though we knew that some schoolmates lived here, we decided not to visit them because we were afraid they might wish to entertain us lavishly, as had been done on the Ho farm. However, we had no idea what we would do here, since our last money had been spent long ago. We were truly beggars who had to live by their wits.

When we arrived, it was about ten in the morning and we were very hungry, since we had eaten no breakfast. When we came to a teashop, we hesitated a moment; then, throwing caution to the four winds, we walked resolutely in. We sat down at a square table in front of a window with umbrellas and bundles beside us, and

we ordered breakfast with tea to drink.

After our hunger was somewhat appeased, we discussed how we were going to pay the bill. We would have to beg or earn the money somehow, somewhere. There was no doubt about that. I suggested that Mao stay at the table to write up his diary, while I went out into the town to see what I could do.

It took but little time to discover that the shopkeepers of Anhwa had no time for beggars. I was refused time after time: "We've nothing for beggars here!" "Don't stand there in the customers' way!" On several occasions I was not even allowed to enter the shop. Someone barred my way saying, "There's nothing here for you! Be on your way!" Their talk was very coarse and the faces seemed cold and cruel. A few people condescended to give me one or two *wen*, a practically worthless coin, but in an hour and a half, after calling at all the shops along two streets, I had only twenty-one *wen*. I gave it up as a bad job and returned to the teashop.

I told Mao how difficult it was to beg in that city, that I had collected less than half enough for our bill after begging along two long streets. How could we pay our bill? How could we get out of the teashop? Mao suggested that he try another street while I wrote my diary, but I knew that was no good. Finally I thought of a plan. I suggested that I take the money I had collected and with it buy some paper. Then I would write out a number of scrolls to present to shop owners, like the *sung hsien sheng*. They are a sort of intellectual beggar who does not beg directly, but presents a written scroll, usually containing a verse of his own composition. The recipient then gives him a small sum of money.

"Maybe I can get a bit more money that way," I suggested. "You stay here and prepare the ink while I buy the paper."

Mao welcomed this suggestion enthusiastically and immediately prepared to rub up some ink. When I went to buy the paper, I copied down the names of the most important shops that I passed. Each paper was about a meter and a half long and thirty centimeters wide; so we cut each one into two pieces.

In my best calligraphy I very carefully wrote out the name of one of the big shops at the top of each sheet. This was a most important point, since each scroll was to be written exclusively for

a single shop; so it would not be easy for them to refuse to accept it. I hoped, too, that they would feel honored to receive a personal scroll. I had selected only big shops which presumably would have lots of money.

At the first shop, my scroll was accepted by a young employee who gave it to three older men. They opened it and smiled in appreciation as they read. Though it was doubtful if they could really appreciate the calligraphy, they did realize that they could not write so well. They looked at me and again at the scroll, repeating time after time, "Very good writing. Very good writing indeed!" They whispered among themselves and I knew they were discussing how much they should give me. If they gave too much, the owners might be angry with them; if they gave too little, they were afraid they would offend a scholar! They could not decide, so finally one of them took the paper into the office of the owner. Instantly a gentleman with a smiling face came out and handed me four *t'ung yuan*, each of which was equivalent to ten *wen*.

He asked me where I came from; how it was that I was so poor, and similar questions which I was about to answer when another well-dressed man came out of the office. He was about forty years of age and very fat. Apparently he was the owner, since the other five immediately scattered, leaving me alone with the newcomer. He asked me some questions in a very polite manner and then he called the young man who had come out first. He had given me some money? Four *t'ung yuan*. "Give him four more!" said the fat man. I thanked him and left the shop. I had received eight *t'ung yuan*, four times the amount I had collected after toiling through two long streets shortly before! I meditated on the cold, cruel looks which greeted my empty hands and on the smiles with which the printed word was welcomed. I found comfort, thinking how learning was respected and I walked to the next shop with greater confidence.

However, the flower does not bloom forever; the moon is not always round; and man is not always happy. Hope was great, and disappointment was also great. In the second shop the owner impatiently waved me away: "What use are words to me? Take your calligraphy away and give it to someone else!" he shouted.

"But the scroll is of no use to anyone else," I protested. "It is

written just for your shop. See, your name is written on it. Please accept it even though you don't want to pay me for it?" I asked.

The man looked at the calligraphy now for the first time and read the name of his shop. Grudgingly he accepted the scroll and thrust two *t'ung yuan* toward me. I thanked him politely and left.

Back in the street I thought of Mao waiting for me in the tea-shop. If he was to wait for me to distribute all the scrolls, he'd have a very long wait; so I decided to go back. We paid our bill and discussed the next move. Though we did not need more money immediately, it seemed a pity and a waste not to utilize the scrolls; so we divided them between us and agreed to meet again in the tea-shop after we had distributed all of them. I gave Mao only the scrolls for the smaller shops since I knew that the larger ones often employed private teachers for the children of the proprietors and they might ask him to write something on the spot. If that happened, he might find himself in a very difficult and embarrassing position, since calligraphy was not his strong point and no one could possibly confuse his large clumsily written words with the writing on the scrolls.

At my first call the writing was accepted politely when the name of the shop was seen to be at the head. Next was a tea store. The owner was a learned man who wrote calligraphy. After admiring my writing, he invited me into his study where I was introduced to his children's tutor. The two of them studied my scroll and the owner sent for some paper and asked me to write a *tui tzu*, the famous antithetical sentences, for him and the tutor. I did as they requested and then asked them to write something. They smiled but the owner pointed to a *tui tzu* hanging on the wall, which had been written by the tutor. The calligraphy was not bad, but I thought mine was better.

I was invited to have tea with them and we three had an interesting talk. "Learning and calligraphy are difficult things," he said, "and they constitute valuable possessions. It is indeed unfortunate that the scholar is so little appreciated in our modern society. I studied for over ten years, but I was unable to find a good job; so I finally decided to open this tea store. If I had continued to study, I should have starved to death years ago!"

"If you had not opened the tea store, I should have been out of

a job, too," added the tutor, "and that would have made one more learned person starving to death."

"And if you had not opened the tea store," I added, "I should not have had the pleasure of meeting you two learned persons, and I would probably have died of hunger in this city of Anhwa!"

The owner laughed loudly at this and said, "It's a pity the store is so small; otherwise I should like to have both of you as tutors in my home!"

"If one studies, he takes the risk of dying of hunger; but if one doesn't study, he does not attain culture. What is one to do?" asked the tutor.

"It seems to me our host has chosen the best plan," I replied. "Study first and then go into business."

"Since I have changed my profession, I cannot be called a scholar," said our host. "But I do have three sons. Two of them I'll put into business and the third will devote his time to study. That way we shall maintain an element of learning in the family and I hope no one will need to die of hunger."

"That's all very well for you because you are fortunate in having three sons," the tutor said, "but what of those who have only one child?"

"This is a father's scheme," I suggested, "a plan for the family as a unit. But, you must remember, a son does not exist merely to support the family. He should be allowed to plan for his own future. He must realize that he's a member of society and he should plan for the ultimate good of that society."

Obviously they didn't understand this idea; but we had already talked for such a long time that I judged it best not to go into further explanations. I had other shops to visit and I said I must get on my way. The owner went to his office and when he returned, he presented me with an envelope. Thanking him, I bade them goodbye and went out into the street. When I opened the envelope, I found it contained twenty *t'ung yuan*!

After I made several other calls with moderate success, I returned to the teashop to pick up Mao.

The next point on our itinerary was to be the district city of Yiyang.