After saying goodbye to his new acquaintance, Mao crossed the river and followed a road which was paved with blue stones for two kilometers or more, when he stopped suddenly. Ahead of him, he saw an enormous building, standing alone in a big open space. It reminded him, more than anything he had ever seen, of a Temple to the Ancestors. He had never seen such an enormous building before, and it was, above all else, the size which made him think of a temple, since a temple was the largest building he had ever seen in the country. Suddenly he began thinking of the old thatched house he had left only that morning. He stared a long time at this “temple,” which was to be his school, comparing it in his mind with his home in the country.

The newly built Tungshan School was a renovation of the old Tungshan Academy. I had spent three years there shortly before Mao’s unexpected arrival. Surrounding the building is an artificial river, in the form of a moat, about a hundred feet wide, crossed by a big, white stone bridge. I remember how I used to love to stand, all alone, on this bridge and watch the fishes dart to and fro in the water. They never seemed to be afraid of the shadows of my hand, even when I really tried to frighten them. Around the moat, there is a solidly built stone wall about fifteen feet high which entirely surrounds the school. We children used to call it the Great Wall of China.

Now that Mao saw the wall, the school looked to him like a fortified city. He squared his shoulders and walked bravely up to the first big gate in the wall, and slowly crossed the white stone bridge, paying scant attention to the beauty of the scene around him. Between the bridge and the main entrance to the school is a large open space, and when Mao arrived there with his luggage on his shoulders, several pupils were running and playing, since it was almost noontime. Mao stared at them curiously and they stopped their game to return his gaze, but having decided among themselves that he was a porter who had brought the luggage for one of their schoolmates, they
quickly returned to their play and Mao proceeded on his way.

However, in a few minutes a boy came running out of the big door, shouting loudly, "Come, all of you, quick! Come quick and see! A laborer wants to come to school, and he's quarreling with the janitor! Come quick and see!"

All the children made a mad rush toward the janitor's room, like a swarm of bees. They stopped and heard Mao say, "Why can't I go to school like other boys?"

They laughed loudly at that and one of them shouted, "You're big enough to go to the University!" Another said, "Why do you want to come to school here? We are not laborers." And the boys all laughed their approval.

While Mao argued with the janitor, a group of boys had been examining his luggage and had discovered the two old, well-thumbed novels in his basket.

"Are these all the books you've brought with you?" one of them scoffed.

"Do you expect to read these bad books in our school?" another wanted to know. "Don't you know that we're not allowed to read bad books like these?"

Laughing and talking, they crowded around Mao, who could not hear what the janitor was saying, till he suddenly called for silence.

"I beg you only to go and tell the Headmaster that I want to speak to him," pleaded Mao.

"I dare not go and disturb the Headmaster with such nonsense," replied the janitor. "You may be a fool, but I am not! What nonsense!"

"If you will not go and announce me, I'll go myself!" cried Mao.

"Just you dare try!" yelled the janitor.

"If you dare!" shouted one of the boys, and the others took up the chorus and shouted at the top of their voices, "If you dare! If you dare!"

Mao picked up his baskets and started toward the door, but the janitor barred the way, shouting, "Get away from this door! Tungshan is a school, not a lunatic asylum!"

The boys all laughed at this and yelled, "Tungshan is not a lunatic asylum! Go away. Go away!"

Mao hesitated and stopped. He did not know what to do next. He
had not expected this sort of reception. In the meantime, one of the smaller boys had slipped away to find the Headmaster and had told him, "Oh, sir, a young bandit is trying to get into our school. Right now he is attacking the janitor. The janitor is trying to defend himself, and all the boys are trying to help him, but the bandit is big, and strong, and is quite savage. You should come and help us. Oh, please come quickly, sir!"

The Headmaster was naturally somewhat perturbed by this strange and naive announcement, and decided he had better go himself and see this "savage young bandit." He stopped to pick up his long pipe, which had a heavy brass bowl at the end of a meter-long bamboo stem. This pipe would come in handy if self-defense were called for. Suddenly, a cry went up: "The Headmaster! The Headmaster is coming!"

As if by tacit agreement, the children formed a close group behind their Headmaster and maintained a most respectful silence. They all had great confidence in his strange long pipe, which it was known he had used successfully in the past to ward off attacks by animals!

“What is the matter? Why all the noise?” he asked, addressing himself to the janitor.

“Sir,” he said, pointing toward Mao Tse-tung, scornfully, “this fool says he wants to enter this school, and he demands to see you. He is nothing but a rogue and a brute! Do you want to see him? Well, there he is!”

The Headmaster turned his gaze upon Mao, his moustache standing out stiff and straight from the sides of his mouth like the Chinese figure eight. Mao came straight toward him and speaking humbly, said, “Please, sir, allow me to study here in your school!”

The Headmaster gave no sign of having heard, but turning to the janitor, he said, “Bring him into my office.”

Mao Tse-tung smiled to himself happily, hoisted his baskets up onto his shoulders and would have followed the Headmaster from the room, without waiting for the janitor. However, the janitor stopped him angrily, “Where do you think you’re going with that luggage on your shoulders? Leave it here and come with me!”

Mao did not want to leave his precious possessions behind him. He was afraid that the boys, who had already been examining his things
with great curiosity, might steal his two novels, and that he might never see them again. Hesitating uncertainly, he said, "I want to take my things with me."

The janitor was furious. "How can you take such things into the Headmaster's office?" he shouted. "Leave them here. Who do you think is interested in your precious possessions? This school isn't a madhouse. It's not a school for thieves either, leave your baskets here. I'm responsible for them. Yes, I'm responsible for them, I tell you!"

Mao hesitated just a moment longer, then carefully placed his things in a corner of the janitor's room and followed him to the Headmaster's office.

At this point, the school boys split into two groups. One followed Mao and the janitor down the hall toward the Headmaster's office, while the other went into the janitor's room where Mao had left his things. In a matter of seconds, the basket was emptied out upon the floor, and the precious books were hidden away in another part of the building. Mao and the janitor, proceeding on their way, were blissfully ignorant of what was happening.

When Mao entered the Headmaster's office, he repeated in the most respectful voice he could command, the request he had made a short time before, "Sir, please will you allow me to study in your school?"

The Headmaster stared at him unbelievingly and asked, "What is your name, boy?"

"My name, sir, is Mao Tse-tung."
"Where do you live, Mao Tse-tung?"
"I live in Shao Shan, about forty or fifty li from here."
"And how old are you?"
"I am just a little over fifteen years old, sir."
"You look big enough to be at least seventeen or eighteen years old."
"No, sir, I am just fifteen years and some months old."
"Have you attended your village school?"
"I studied for two years with Mr. Wang and I can read novels quite well."
"What kind of novels do you read, Mao Tse-tung?"
"I have read San Kuo Chih Yen I and Shui Hu quite a lot."
"Have you read the primary-school books?"
“No, sir, I haven’t read them.”
“Are you able to read the second-year school books?”
“Most of them. There are some words that I don’t know yet.”
“Have you learned any mathematics?”
“No, sir, I haven’t.”
“How much history and geography do you know?”
“I haven’t learned any history or geography yet.”
“I want you to write two lines of classic characters.”
Mao took the pen and wrote some words in a very clumsy fashion. His hands were large and tough, much more accustomed to hard work than to holding a pen.
“No, it’s no good. You cannot come to this school. We have no primary classes for beginners. Besides, you are too big to go to a primary school.”
“Oh, please, let me enter your school. I want to study,” pleaded Mao.
“You could not follow the classes. It’s quite hopeless.”
“But I will try. Please let me stay.”
“No, that’s impossible. You could never follow the classes. It would be a waste of your time.”
“But I will try very hard. . . .”
At this point, Hu, one of the masters, who had overheard part of the interview, came into the room. He was quite impressed by Mao’s obvious keenness, and he proposed that they grant his request. He suggested that Mao be allowed to attend classes for a five months’ trial period. If by that time he had not shown progress so that he could make the grade, he should go.
The Headmaster consented to the experiment on that basis, and further suggested that Hu give Mao some private lessons.
And so Mao Tse-tung entered Tungshan School, but only on a temporary basis, for a half year. (12)