Father PAUL'S WAR

Father PAUL'S WAR

MARK CHENG

APP
Alliance Publishing Press

Alliance Publishing Press

Published by Alliance Publishing Press Ltd
This paperback edition published 2013
Copyright © Mark Cheng 2013
Mark Cheng asserts his moral right to be
identified as the author of this book.

All rights reserved.
With the exception of attributed quotations, no part of this
document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by
any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording,
or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

ISBN-13: 9 780956 999252

Typeset in Times New Roman
Book & Cover Design by Mark James James

Mark Cheng – A Biography

Mark Cheng was born in Hong Kong in 1930, the eldest of nine children. Following the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, he and his family fled to China in 1942. Mark left his family there, and followed his old headmaster, Father Donnelly, to India where he stayed until 1947.

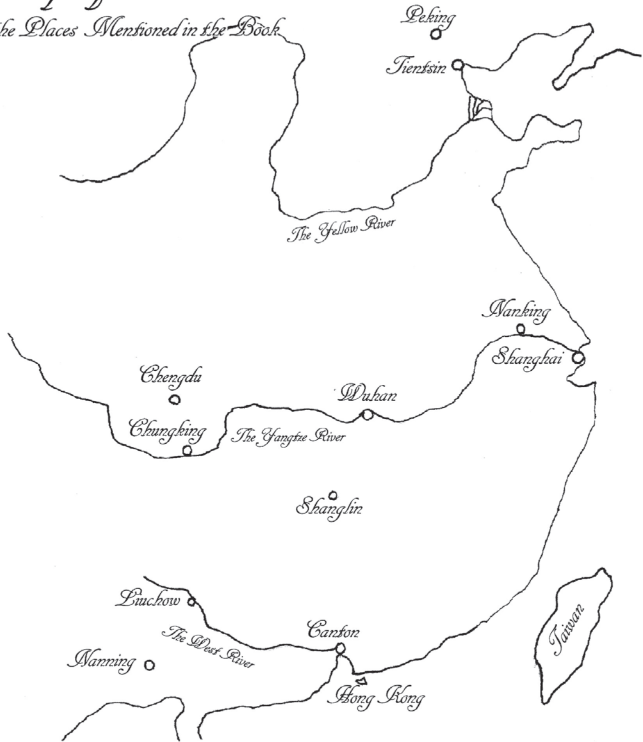
Back in Hong Kong and inspired by his teachers, Mark became a Jesuit novice in 1949. But he realised that the life wasn't for him, and he left the noviciate to train as a history teacher. He met his wife Irene at teacher training college, marrying in 1957. Realising that Hong Kong would eventually be handed back to the Chinese, Mark moved once more. He and his young family came to the UK, where they have remained ever since.

Mark and Irene have a son, a daughter, and five grandchildren. In his spare time Mark has been a Parish Choirmaster, and Choir Director of a Gregorian Chant group. He also paints, and in 2005 was a founder member of the Eagle Gallery Artists group in Bedford.

To the Cistercian monks
of our Lady of Consolation
at Yang Chia Ping near Peking

Environs of Yang Chia Ping

Map of China



Old and New Romanisation of Place Names

Peking - Beijing
Tientsin - Tianjin
Nanking - Nanjing
Canton - Guangzhou
Liuchow - Liuzhou
Chungking - Chongqing

ONE

He had come into the valley, and into its familiar silence, disturbed only by the occasional small sounds of the vegetation. Familiar, too, were the tall, serrated ranks of blue-grey peaks which flanked this barren valley with its rocky soil. It was dotted about with dwarf oaks and small pines which showed dark against the bleached ochre of the steep hillsides. Wild rhododendrons shared the landscape, and in summer flooded the desolate valley with primal colours, but they now also showed dark against the soil. There were apricot trees, too, and in springtime the soft pastel hues of their blossoms briefly transformed the quasi-lunar landscape into an ethereal, soft-edged Eden. The oil from the kernels of their fruit had provided a valuable, if not a substantial, income to those who once inhabited the valley. But this valley, in spite of a fleeting impression in spring, or when the rhododendrons flowered in their glory in summer, was not Eden. The meagre living which was wrested from its unyielding, stony soil was the result of much sweat and toil.

The pines swayed and rustled, and dust rose briefly as a cold wind blew down the valley, for it was already November, and the oaks and apricot trees had shed their leaves. The late morning sun shone pale yellow, without much warmth, in a washed, pale blue sky, made even paler in parts by a haze of marestail clouds. He shivered and wrapped his cotton quilted coat more closely around his spare frame. He was alone in the valley, as he had expected, on the narrow metalled road which he had once helped to build. He was hungry. At least he knew he ought to be hungry, as he had not eaten since the

evening before, and that only sparingly, for his supper had consisted merely of a crust of stale steamed bread. He had been very reluctant to use the little money which he had managed to earn and save. He had other plans for that money. He felt for it now, the notes and the coins, which he carried in a cloth tied to his belt. Yes, it was still there. He realised that he had been getting paranoid about his little share of worldly wealth. He must be careful.

He had not far to go now, only another mile and a half, give or take a few yards: not much at all after a week's journey, when he had walked for ten or more hours a day. This was nearly journey's end, for the next twelve hours or so. He picked up his canvas rucksack, slung it on his shoulder, and continued his journey up the valley.

There should have been a pair of simple wrought iron gates at the end of the road, set in the middle of a boundary wall built of the bluish-grey brick that was the universal building material of the country which extended levelly on both sides before rising, following the gradient of the valley sides. However, the gates were no longer there, only the remains of the wall, and the debris left at its base. Two years' weathering had not been sufficient to transform the cruel destruction into an acceptable historical ruin. Some of the brickwork had been washed clean, but in many places the charring caused by the blaze still looked fresh. The brass plaque, which had been a gift of a benefactor and which had been set into one of the gate pillars, remained in place, even though it showed evidence of partial melting and was now discoloured by verdigris. He had been told of the destruction, and had visualised it to be much more comprehensive. Now, he was only surprised that the wall had not entirely disappeared, with the still usable bricks carted away for other buildings. The isolation of the place had something to do with it, he was certain.

He stepped through what had been the gateway into the enclosure. The porter's lodge was only a blackened shell; the interior was full of what had been its roof. Burnt timber lay about the area, some on

top of and some under broken roof tiles. Amazingly, there was still soot on the remains of what once had been whitewashed walls, and he could even tell where the crucifix had hung. There was no way in which the little building could be made functional again.

Weeds were rife in what had been a well-tended garden which lined the avenue from the gate to the centre of the enclosure. The lawn was now waist-high grass and weeds. But some of the plants, if bare now because of the season and distinguishable from the surrounding growth only because he knew where they had been, were still there, where they had not been deliberately vandalised or destroyed. The apricot trees and the pear trees, he had been told, had been put to the torch, but many of them, he could see from a distance, had managed to survive and were now in their winter gauntness and still growing in the orchards. The hardy and fruitful apricot trees never needed much tending, anyway. The pear trees, which had been introduced into the valley in the last century, were almost as hardy. However, he might take a closer look later. He wondered what had happened to the oats and the millet, too.

He went on towards the main buildings. The remains of the main buildings. And the watery sunshine and desolation and his memories accompanied him all the way. Yes, his memories had come with him. But somewhere, he had left his feelings behind.

If parts of the four walls of the porter's lodge had been left standing, there was not much in the complex of the main buildings apart from a few jagged remains that used to be walls, and heaps of rubble. In front of him was the huge mound of fallen bricks and wood which was once the bell tower. He walked round that into the nave, and apart from the lower half of two bays in the sanctuary there was nothing left of the Chapel. The top of the stone high altar lay on its side, leaning against the stone supports. He turned right and saw that the cloister garden had not survived the fire. Half of the walls of the Chapter Room were still standing, and the ledge on which the last row of seats had been built had survived. Surprisingly, too,

it was almost free of debris. Across from the cloister garden, where the kitchen used to be, the solid brick-built stoves were still in place, but where the dormitories had collapsed on top of the Refectory and the warming room near by, there was only a mountain of rubble. In the other wing, the library and scriptorium had fallen into the study rooms. He climbed on top of the heap there, and under a roof tile he found a book. It must have been the only book which had, perhaps miraculously, survived the night of destruction, and had lain there for more than two years, exposed to the elements but protected by its robust cover and the friendly tile. The title on the spine had been bleached off, but the inside, though damp, was still in reasonable condition and certainly legible. It was St Bede's *History of the English Church*.

He nearly laughed aloud to himself. What use was St Bede to him now? Why couldn't he have found a copy of the Vulgate, or at least St Thomas à Kempis!

However, he put St Bede into his rucksack.

He picked his way through to the Abbot's house. There was nothing left there except for the obligatory pile of rubble. This building had received most attention from the pillagers who had believed that vast amounts of gold had been secreted there, and he could see the holes which had been dug in the floor in the search for that mythical treasure. The guest house next door and the infirmary on the other side had fared no better. Further out, he could see that none of the workshops, barns and granaries had been left with their roofs on. The oil presses would not have survived either. It would be pointless, too, to explore the stables. He wondered if any of the packhorses and mules would still be alive, working for other masters.

Another gust of wind blew down the valley, and he suddenly realised how tired he was. He used to be able to tell the time by reading the shadows cast by the buildings, but he couldn't do that now. He looked at the sun.

It must be about eleven, he told himself.

Time enough for a rest first. He headed for the Chapter Room.

As he stepped over the threshold, somehow the desolation around him seemed to vanish. He felt that the walls were around him again, and that the only light came through the lancet windows on either side of the Abbot's seat, with above it the large crucifix that hung on the wall, the wood black and the corpus waxy-white in death. He was again in his habit, as he advanced and bowed to the Abbot. But the brief vision disappeared as he straightened up. He walked over and sat down where he had last sat in Chapter, in the back row against the wall.

He shut his eyes as memories filled his mind. He remembered when he had first attended Chapter. As a new member of the Community he had sat in the front row near the entrance. But before that…

***

He was a southerner from near Canton, where his family lived. His father, a distant, unusually tall, majestic figure, had named him Leung Waihung, and the name had been duly entered into the family archives which were locked up in a safe in his father's room. He was the third of five sons and two daughters, and he was the youngest child of his own mother. He quite early on realised that he was his mother's favourite – being the youngest, he supposed – but his mother never spoiled him. His father had two other wives, both of whom were senior to his mother, but his mother, he learned later in life, had been loved best. That, however, did not seem to have caused ill-feeling among the wives – it was merely a fact of life. Father was a salt merchant, and therefore a wealthy man, and they lived in a big house with a large, formal European garden and three courtyards with a suite of rooms round each, one for each wife and her children. There was an army of servants. He had a special servant all to himself, who shadowed him everywhere. There was a major-domo who practically had authority over life and death – perhaps he did have; he could never be very sure. Two or three times a

week, sometimes more often, this man would hang a lantern over his mother's door, and this meant that she would not be with them that night. He always missed her on these occasions. He tried begging her to stay, but his mother would say nothing, would give him a hug and a kiss, and then was gone. At first he was quite puzzled by the connection between the appearance of the lantern and his mother's absence, and people, even his older siblings, would smile but would not answer when he asked. It was not until much later that he learned the significance of the lantern, and then he took it for granted.

They were a happy family; the half-brothers and half-sisters got on well together, and the children mixed at the family meals twice a day. They used to sally forth into the countryside on picnics and for their favourite pastimes, boating and swimming in the river, ignorant of, or ignoring, the political unrest which was devastating the country. The war between the central government and the local warlords, who were no more than robber barons, did not break the latters' hold over individual provinces, and the subsequent war between the government and the Communists only came to an uneasy and inconclusive truce in the early 1930s. However, these events seemed very far away to a little boy, and the place he liked best, when he felt the need to be by himself, was a spot in the angle between two roofs which he got to by climbing through a window in his room. He quite often did this deliberately to annoy his servant, who never discovered his hiding place and would look everywhere for him.

"Master Waihung, where are you?"

"I'm here," he would say softly, with a grin all over his face.

From his hiding place he could see a wide sweep of the countryside, where the colours mutated according to the seasons, and the trees changed their robes as frequently as the seasons changed. Beyond the paddy fields and the orchards, he could catch a glimpse of the big river, and the dark shapes of the barges on it. When the wind was right, he could just about hear the chug of the barges' engines.

He could stay in his hiding place for hours, and he often did.

He did well at school, and decided to go to university as two of his half-brothers had done before him. Both went to the American Christian university of Lingnan in Canton.

"Lingnan's the place," one of his elder half-brothers told him. "It's a great university, and I enjoyed my time there."

He must have done. He had also become a Christian and married a Christian girl in a Christian church. That was the first time Waihung had been in contact with Christians, and he wasn't very sure that he liked being one of them. If his sister-in-law Meiching was typically Christian, then they must be very difficult people to live with, with their taboos and so many things they couldn't share with the family. In addition, Meiching was forever trying to convert people, and he resented that. He decided that he did not want to go to Lingnan, respected though it was in South China. It also had the reputation of being an establishment for the rich, and he realised now that he was developing an incipient social conscience. Besides, he wanted to do engineering, not liberal arts. For this he had a precedent in the family. One of his uncles had been among the first Chinese students sent by the government on a scholarship to America to study marine engineering; he now lived in Hong Kong and worked for a ship-building firm. Although the family occasionally heard from him, the relationship was not close. However, he was not interested in building ships; his interest was in bridges and roads, part of the infrastructure that the country needed to get on a par with European countries.

He heard that there was a good engineering school at the University of Hong Kong. He liked the sound of Hong Kong. Some of his friends went there to do medicine, and he learned from them what a lively, vibrant place it was. ("And the girls are great," one of them said.) Also, his father was willing, and he was very tempted, but then he decided against that, too.

"I don't want to spend an extra year in Hong Kong just to improve

my English, which is worse than my Mandarin, and then find that I can't cope with the language," he told his mother, who was rather relieved that he had decided not to go too far away, after all.

And then she burst into floods of tears when he told her that he had got a place at Peking University to do engineering under the great Hasselbach. That was in 1931.

The family, the clan, made a weekend of it at the end of August, in Canton. But before they left home, his mother burned incense on the family altar, and together they put joss sticks into the earthenware pot that stood on it. They went to stay in a really grand hotel, where the floors were laid with marble from Tali and there was a bathroom with an enamel bath on each level, where the doorman bowed to you and 'boys' in uniform carried your luggage for you from the rickshaw to your rooms. There were also ceiling fans which one could make to turn at three different speeds. It was so very different from the country inn in his home village. But wasn't Canton noisy at night!

They went shopping the next morning at the Sun Department Store and the Sincere Department Store, with their garishly dressed windows and bright lights – even in the daytime. There one could buy chinaware and glass and bathtubs and clothes on mannequins. There just was no end to the variety and amount of stuff one could spend money on, and all the goods had come from the United States, France, England and even South America.

"Look, Mother," he kept saying. "I've got enough things to take with me. I don't want any more."

It proved to be a losing battle. It was, in fact, a lost battle even before it had begun. He was, however, thankful when his father bought him a wristwatch.

"Just give him the best you have," he told the sales assistants who swarmed round to serve him. He always had that sort of effect on people.

"You'll need that, my son," he told him in his lofty way.

His mother bought him a pair of American shoes, and one of his half-brothers bought him a tie.

"You'll have to learn to put on a tie, Waihung," he said, "when you meet girls and go to dances, and things."

Then it was time for lunch. They went to a restaurant which belonged to a friend of his father, and they had to have three large round tables to accommodate the Leung clan. They had a complete floor to themselves. After that, the young people went sightseeing in a fleet of rickshaws. They went to inspect the ships on the quayside, to look at the English houses in Shameen, and to gaze up at the tall Gothic facade of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. This was one of the wonders of Canton. It was built all of stone, and astonished the locals with its size and its soaring spires. The people of Canton called it simply 'Stone House'.

"How are they different from your lot?" he asked his Christian sister-in-law, and immediately regretted the question. Meiching spent the rest of the afternoon trying to explain the differences to him.

All good things come to an end. The next morning they saw him off at the crowded, busy railway station. The goodbyes were suitably decorous and unembarrassing. His mother held herself ramrod-straight and managed not to burst into tears though he could see that her lips were trembling. But it was his father who surprised him. He had not expected anything more than a curt nod of the head when he said goodbye. But the old man extended his hand for him to shake.

"Waihung," he said formally, "you are the most intelligent of all my sons. So, do well in your studies. You carry the hopes of the family."

He thought that barely twenty-five years ago the resources of the entire family would have been deployed to get him through various stages of education with the ultimate aim of his entering the Imperial Civil Service Examinations. He wondered if he would be honour-bound to commit suicide if he failed that degree examination, though

it was an unlikely possibility.

He did not enjoy the journey to Peking much. For one thing, it was too long, even on an express, for he was travelling from one end of the country to the other. He was thankful that his father had insisted on a private sleeper. It gave him his own space, but it also meant that he was isolated from his fellow passengers. He tried to study the landscape with the eye of a would-be civil engineer, but that, too, palled after four or five hours, and thereafter, one paddy field was much like another. The scenery did change as the train made its slow climb up the wide, mountainous and wild watershed which divided the Pearl River basin from that of the Yangtzekiang. The town of Kukkong, which controlled one of the rail routes through the mountains, was passed in the night, and the train wended its interminable way for the next couple of days to Wuhan – he had to remember to call it 'Wuhan' in Mandarin rather than 'Mohon' in his mother tongue – on the Yangtze. Beyond Kukkong, the people spoke, as far as he was concerned, a different language, which, in spite of his being taught it at school, he had difficulty in understanding at first. He was in effect in another country.

The arrival in Peking was a relief. Being confined to a train, even if he had his own private space, was not much fun. He didn't feel as though he could have taken much more. At least, however, he had read all the books he had brought with him from Canton, plus another couple he had acquired en route, while the flat, alluvial plain of northern China flashed by outside his window. He went straight from the railway station to his university hall, where he found he had been allocated a first-floor room overlooking a walkway between grassed areas criss-crossed by minor pathways which connected most of the halls of residence. The spartan, simply furnished bedroom-cum-study, with desk and chair and bookcase, a slightly wobbly wardrobe next to an enamel washbasin on a stand, and an iron bedstead with a rather worn mattress, appealed to him, and he found the idea that it was to be his home for the next four years

rather exciting. It did not occur to him until later that this was his first taste of freedom, a sort of coming of age. After settling in, he spent the next few days before term started in the company of some new friends he had made, sightseeing in the city, capital of the country no longer since the beginning of the Republic, but still impressive with its wide boulevards and its cobbled side streets, a mixture of the ancient and modern utilitarian. On the whole, he thought, he much preferred Canton as a city.

Finally, on the second day of term, he and all the other civil engineering first-year students met Dr Michael Hasselbach in the faculty's No. 3 lecture theatre. There were not many Europeans on the teaching staff then at Peking University, and Hasselbach would have been easily picked out. There were reported sightings of him on the first day of term. Waihung was curious, but he had had no luck. And then, the door behind the lecturer's desk which ran the whole width of the platform opened and the great Hasselbach entered. The chatter died, and the freshers, not certain what to do, shuffled to their feet.

Hasselbach turned out to be of shortish stature, and to have a polished dome of a head round which was a fringe of light brown hair. Below somewhat bushy eyebrows were eyes which were grey and expectedly penetrating. He was dressed in a dark suit, a dark red shirt and a brightly coloured tie which clashed beautifully with the shirt. That was his lecture theatre outfit, his new students later discovered. The only thing that ever changed was the tie, and it was always brightly coloured, as though he had little dress sense, or didn't really care how he looked. However, although he might be somewhat reminiscent of the absent-minded professor, he showed, at that first meeting, that he spoke impeccable Mandarin – which was more than some of his new students did.

"Thank you, gentlemen. Please do resume your seats. You are no longer in a middle school, and I do not expect you to stand up for my entrance. My name is Hasselbach, as you all know, I expect, and you can address me as Dr Hasselbach."

Then he did what a teacher always did at the first meeting with new students. He checked the register, outlined the course, and issued a timetable. And that was the end of the first lecture.

Life at the university proved to be congenial. Waihung fitted quickly and painlessly into the academic and social rounds that made up this life, and he was picked for the university basketball team. The new southerners briefly went mad as they always did when they first experienced snow, which this year came in early December. They dived into it, built snowmen, pelted one another with the stuff, and generally behaved as though they were only half their age. And then they regained their sanity.

He was a natural hard-worker and enjoyed the challenge that his new studies provided him. From the grade B which he was given for his first written paper, and for which Hasselbach congratulated him, he progressed to a straight A by the end of December, and thereafter his grades never strayed below that. He was intelligent enough to realise that he was still, in the first semester, at a rudimentary stage of his studies, but was beginning to find that Hasselbach was increasingly seeking his contribution in group discussions and seminars. One day, early in January, he kept to his bed because of flu, and in the afternoon one of his friends came to see him. He had been half-dozing and he felt light-headed. But, having been on his own all day, he was glad to see him.

"You know, Waihung," said his friend, depositing his own pile of books on the floor by the only chair in the room before he sat down, "how Black Broom's eyes sweep the lecture theatre when he walks in? And you know what he asked this morning?"

This friend was another southerner. There were quite a few of them at the university, even among the first-year engineering students. To the more irreverent of them, the professor was 'Black Broom' because that's what his name sounded like in Cantonese.

"No. You tell me. And in the meantime, please do pass me the aspirin."

At home, his mother would have given him a rice bowl full of a bitter herbal brew, the ingredients for which she got from the medicine shop in the village, and wrapped him in a thick cotton quilt so that he sweated out the fever. But, like the majority of his new friends at the university, who professed to be cynics and atheists and believed that SCIENCE had an answer to every question in the cosmos, he believed in the supremacy of modern medicine, and it certainly required much less labour.

"Here you are… and shall I pour you a glass of water? Well, old Hasselbach, after sweeping the room with his white eyes, said, 'And where is young Mr Leung this fine morning?'"

"And what did you say?"

"*I* didn't say anything. Nobody did, because we didn't know where you were. And then he said, 'Should any of you see him in the next twenty-four hours, would you tell him I particularly want to see him about his last paper.'"

He groaned. "I knew I shouldn't have put that in the paper!"

"Why? What did you write?"

He sat up to explain, but had to close his eyes until the dizzy spell had passed. His friend was concerned, but he persisted.

"Well?" he asked when his friend had finished. "What do you think?"

"You want me to be honest?"

He nodded. And winced when whatever was inside his head decided to start knocking.

"It won't work." His friend then took fifteen minutes to tell him why it wouldn't work. "It's the mass and the weight. And now, shall I bring you some soup? Or do you prefer noodles?"

"Soup, please. And a bit of that steamed bread." He was not to know that steamed bread was going to play a rather important part in his life.

Two days later, he felt well enough to go back to class, although he still felt somewhat unsteady on his feet. He followed Hasselbach

to his rooms after the lecture.

"Are you better?" asked the professor as he ushered his pupil into his office.

"I'm much better, thank you, sir."

The simplicity of the furnishings of the professor's room no longer surprised him. The rooms of his other teachers were much more plush. Nor was he surprised when Hasselbach offered him green tea from a thermos flask instead of English tea or American coffee as some of his Chinese colleagues would do.

"Now, Waihung." They had settled on what he wished to be called at their first meeting. "About your paper… Have you heard of this man?" Hasselbach handed him a volume from a pile on his desk.

"No."

"Read from page 147."

He looked up, rather embarrassed. "I'm sorry, I haven't got enough English."

"No matter. Well, this what he is saying…" Hasselbach translated. "Sounds familiar?"

"That's what I wrote," he stammered. "Almost exactly the same."

Hasselbach smiled. "Let me congratulate you, Waihung. What you wrote isn't new, but that you should have been able to work it out for yourself independently, that's something. More than something. We'll make an engineer of you yet! By the way, you should learn English, you know, to read the journals and books, and German too, if you can manage that."

Then, as he rose to go, Hasselbach stayed him.

"Are you going home for Chinese New Year after the exams?" he asked.

"No. It's not worth it. By the time I get home, it will be almost time to start back again. Some of us are going to stick together and we'll see what we can do."

"Yes, I think I have an idea who they are. Will you come to a party Black Broom holds every Chinese New Year's Eve for

homeless strays from Canton and other places? I've asked some of them already, and they are going to come. By the way, they are not all from engineering."

Then he suddenly realised that Hasselbach had spoken in Cantonese.

"Oh, yes, I'll come!"

"Well, then. This is the address. Some of you know it."

***

It was not difficult to find the address on Maple Street although he had not been able to meet anyone yet who was familiar with it. He arrived with a number of fellow guests who had decided to come along together, and having pressed the large brass doorbell they were waiting outside the whitewashed, functional two-storey building. It did not look like a private dwelling.

"It looks like a…"

They could not make up their minds what it looked like. The door opened and a face peered short-sightedly at them from behind thick lenses.

"You must be Father Hasselbach's guests," said the white-jacketed man. "Do come in out of the cold."

They were in a spacious entrance hall, as simply decorated as Hasselbach's college room. The only furniture was two upright chairs, one on each side of the double front door, and both covered by a mountain of overcoats. On the wall opposite was a large crucifix. (Very much like the one in the Chapter Room, he recalled.) Four doorways led into the entrance area, and they all had double doors. The partially open ones on the left wall led, he could glimpse, into some sort of church. Two doorways flanked the crucifix on the wall opposite. The doors to the left were closed, and above them was affixed a wooden panel on which was painted the word 'Private'. The doors to the right were open, and through them he could see a lighted corridor with a number of rooms off it. There were stacks of chairs and tables in the corridor, as though they had been cleared

from another room. The last pair of doors, those on the far right, were open and through them he could hear the chatter of conversation and the clink of glasses.

"You can leave your coats here, and it's through there." The man then disappeared through the doors marked 'Private'.

It was a largish room, with a movable blackboard pushed into a corner. He was now sure that those desks and chairs had been moved out from in here. A good effort had been made to transform the room for the festive occasion – crêpe paper streamers hung from the ceiling, and there were balloons everywhere. Someone had written 'Respectful Wishes for Spring Happiness' on a large sheet of red paper and this occupied an honoured position over a fireplace where a cheerful fire was blazing. On either side of the fireplace were long tables loaded with bottles and bowls of drink and plates of food. There were already perhaps twenty people in the room, both men and women, and they turned to look at the new arrivals, glasses in their hands, before resuming their conversations.

Hasselbach, no longer disguised as a layman with an appalling dress sense, was now encased in the sort of black gown which Waihung knew from what he had seen in photographs was the normal attire for Christian priests. He advanced to meet them. His manners were far too hearty, he thought. He felt resentful. He felt betrayed by one whom he had respected and learned to trust.

"Welcome, all of you."

He reluctantly put out his hand to be shaken, and he could tell by the quick glance Hasselbach he threw him that he immediately felt his hostility. The priest then turned to greet the others who had come with him.

"Meet some of my friends," said Hasselbach. Two other men, both dressed like Hasselbach, waited to be introduced. "Father Tauziat, our Superior." This was the tall, ascetic-looking man with a wild mane of near-white hair. "Father Liu." This was the Chinese man, about his own height.

Waihung and his party shook hands with both men.

"This," said Hasselbach, "is Mr Leung Waihung, my star pupil in this year's intake. He's obtained an A-plus in the end-of-semester exam he's just done. If he's not careful, he'll make an excellent engineer."

"We've heard a lot about you," said Father Tauziat. "Congratulations."

They were then introduced to the other group of guests. Some he had known well, others he had by sight only, and still others he had not known at all.

"And this is Miss Margaret Siu."

Hasselbach was introducing him to a slim, pretty girl, dressed in a plain blue silk ankle-length gown edged with some sort of silver embroidery punctuated with tiny pearls. Her eyes were almost on a level with his, but then she was wearing high-heeled shoes.

"How do you do?" he said formally. They shook hands.

She had short, lightly permed hair, framing a gently curved, pear-shaped face and ever-so-slightly slanting eyes that made him gasp.

"I've seen you about," she said. "You have to be in engineering, if you know Dr Hasselbach so well."

"I don't really know him at all, apart from his being my professor," he said, his resentment now surfacing. "I certainly didn't know he was a Christian missionary!"

He could feel Margaret stiffening.

"Look, I'm not a Christian myself, neither Catholic nor Protestant, but I think you are not being fair. The Jesuits run this place so that people like us who come from other parts of China can meet and socialise. I've been coming here now for four months, and I've never had Christianity preached at me."

"Jesus Society! That says it all, doesn't it?"

Margaret threw him a withering look.

"You are ignorant, and suspicious as only the ignorant can be!" She pointedly turned her back on him, walked away and spoke to

someone else.

For the rest of the evening, he wandered listlessly from group to group, always taking care to avoid Margaret and Dr Hasselbach, but he was unable to become a part of any group. He fancied that after the preliminary greetings he was politely excluded. He thought of leaving the party and going back to his room except, he realised, that would be even worse. Eventually he found himself with the Chinese priest.

"How do you find Peking, Mr Leung?"

He didn't want to say that he preferred the glitter of Canton.

"An interesting city," he said noncommittally.

"Apart from the historic parts," said Father Liu, "like the Forbidden City, I much prefer Shanghai, where I come from. It's much more… international, and it's so alive! Have you been to Shanghai?"

"No. I hope to go one day." He actually wanted to ask: Why did you become a Jesuit?

"I did my training and my university studies at Zikawei near Shanghai. Have you heard of a man called Zi? He gave that place to the Jesuits."

Waihung shook his head.

"He was a Confucian scholar in the last years of the Ming Dynasty. He is credited with being the first modern Chinese to have been converted to Christianity. He took the name of Paul when he became a Catholic."

"That would have been" – Waihung made a quick calculation – "at the beginning of the seventeenth century? I thought that Christianity came in with the Unequal Treaties in the last hundred years."

"No. Do you know that Christianity first came to China in the sixth century in the form of a heretical sect called the Nestorians? And then again in the thirteenth century in the Yuan Dynasty? And it did well on both occasions. So, you see, Christianity and China are old friends. You may also like to know that the mother of the

last Ming emperor was baptised Constance."

He wanted to know why the Nestorians were heretics, and what happened in the thirteenth century. He was surprised that he was no longer angry. This polite, casual conversation had dispelled the resentment.

The party came to an end soon after ten, and the guests decided to visit the traditional New Year's Eve Fair and watch the fireworks which ushered in the New Year. They went in a body, but the girls were sticking together, and he was far too shy to approach Margaret in public. But the fair was good fun and the fireworks noisy and brilliant.

"You can tell me more about the Jesuits another time," he had said to Father Liu half in jest, but only half, as they said goodbye.

"So perhaps I'll see you again? You can come any time. Oh, and do you play chess?"

***

This first Chinese New Year away from home passed uneventfully. In fact, there was scarcely anything to do. Everything was shut down for three days, and the red litter which was the debris of fireworks and firecrackers grew at a terrific rate. Shops and restaurants only reopened reluctantly, it seemed, on the fourth day. He was beginning to enjoy his independence and his freedom and did not mind the solitude. While most of the country made the obligatory rounds of visits to relatives and superiors, he was quietly – yes, quietly, for the university campus was almost entirely deserted except for those who had chosen to stay – learning English. He found that he was assimilating vocabulary without any difficulty, which was what he wanted for reading. Speaking the language, he knew, was another matter.

Halfway through the holiday, he felt that he needed a break, and he went for a long walk round the city, and somehow found himself in Maple Street.

"Why not?" he said to himself, and knocked on the door.

***

The new semester had begun, and he had not seen Margaret again since the party when they all wished one another Happy New Year as they parted to go their separate ways after the fireworks. She had said goodbye stiffly, refusing to look him in the eye.

And he had neglected to ask her which of the women's residential halls she was in.

Then early one morning, she came down the walkway which led past his window, clutching an armful of books and files, her head bare in the freezing air, her footsteps making deep imprints in the thick snow left by the previous night's heavy fall. He struggled with the window, which had frozen to its frame, but managed to throw it open before the girl went past.

"Margaret!" he called, his voice hollow and dead amid the softness of the snow.

She heard him, however. She turned, looked up and recognised him, then smiled and waved, hostility forgotten.

"Wait! Just a minute!" He got into his coat, grabbed his books and raced down the stairs, then at the bottom he remembered that he had forgotten his scarf. And so he had to rush back upstairs to get it.

"Hello," they said at the same time.

"Are you always this early?" he asked.

"No. It's just that today I've to see my tutor before the morning lecture, about something I wrote."

"What actually do you do?"

"I never told you, did I? I do Chemistry, under Professor Tsao."

"And then… research?"

"Maybe. But I want to go into pharmaceutics eventually."

Then conversation flagged, and they walked on in silence. He thought hard of things to say but his mind would not respond.

"I heard that you played chess with Father Liu," she said after a while, turning round to look at him.

"Oh, yes. I needed a break that day." He was pleased that she knew.

"Are you any good?" she asked. "At chess, I mean."

He laughed, and regretted it. He swallowed a lungful of cold air, and went into a paroxysm of coughing.

That made her laugh, but it did not make her cough. She thumped him on the back.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. I'll be all right in a minute. Anyway, Father Lau… I mean Liu… beat me twice. I won the third game, but I suspect that was because he let me win."

And that was utterly ego-deflating. He had been champion chess player at his school, with an unblemished record.

Too soon, they arrived at the Chemistry building.

"Well," she said, "here I am. Nice of you to walk with me."

They shook hands. But he wanted more than that. He took a deep breath, for he had never asked a girl for a date before – in fact, he had never met a girl before.

"Can we… meet for lunch?" he stammered, and he could feel his face colouring. Later he could swear that her face coloured too, ever so slightly. "In the canteen?"

"Yes."

"About half past twelve?"

"Fine." And then she hurried into the building.

***

No man could forget his first date with a girl. And even now, eighteen years and another life later, sitting on a hard stone seat amid the ruins, the memory of that first lunch with Margaret still stirred him. People said that one never married one's first love, and in his case, it had certainly been true. Without regrets, and true. He wondered what had happened to her.

He was glad that his feelings had come back to him.

***

The harsh northern Chinese winter rolled into spring, and the cherry blossoms added another dimension to the landscape. He and some

of his friends became frequent visitors to the Jesuit Chaplaincy, for that was what it was, and there he quite frequently ran into Margaret. Most of those who made use of the facilities there had come from the Canton area, but there were also others from the Cantonese-speaking areas of Kwangsi. They came to chat and to exchange gossip, to play table tennis in the lecture room after they had cleared it of desks and chairs and set up the table, or sometimes to dance to records on a gramophone which one of them had to wind every three records or so. In another room were less active activities such as ludo and Monopoly, and even snakes and ladders. Many were the games of chess he lost to Father Liu, sometimes with Margaret sipping tea and watching, and going into distracting fits of laughter when an important piece was taken.

One day, they were setting up for another game when Father Liu stopped.

"Wait," he said. "I'll show you something."

He returned a few moments later with a rectangular wooden box and a large board divided into black and red squares.

"You know what this is?" he asked, as he took the carved pieces from the box and arranged them on the board.

"I know," said Margaret. "That's European chess. I learned to play when I was at school. It's not that different from Chinese chess."

They played a trial game, with Margaret guiding Waihung successfully through the moves, then he lost the next game to Father Liu.

"You two have a game," said the priest. "I'll watch."

In spite of Father Liu's frequent prompting, he lost to Margaret too.

"You didn't mind losing to me, did you?" she asked later.

"Why should I mind?"

***

"Your protégé and that very attractive girl, Margaret," Father Liu remarked to Father Hasselbach that evening over their after-dinner

pipes, as trails of tobacco smoke wafted slowly and picturesquely to the ceiling. "They seem to get along."

Hasselbach threw him a look, grunted, but said nothing, and continued pulling on his pipe.

***

Waihung went for bicycle rides into the countryside with his friends, and watched the maize and the wheat and the barley being sown, and then returned to chart the progress of its growth, simply out of interest and curiosity. Often the party had their meals in country inns or at wayside foodstalls, and as often they took picnics with them and ate them under shady trees. Their occasional boisterousness caused the country people to mutter into their hands. On other days, he and Margaret went for long rides on country buses, and did not mind, or care, where they took them, just as long as they were able to sit companionably together and watch the scenery go by outside the dusty windows.

On one such bus trip, an old woman who had got on with a cage full of chicks, and who appeared to ignore everybody on the bus, said to him as she went past on her way out after several stops, "The little young lady is very pretty."

Caught by surprise, he didn't know what to say, but grinned. Margaret turned pink. They looked at each other: the old lady had assumed too much.

Sometimes, especially when it rained, they went to the cinema to watch Charlie Chaplin and the Keystone Kops, and once or twice they went to the Peking opera, but as Margaret did not particularly care for the music they stopped going together. When asked, he went with his other friends. And Margaret, who had gone to a convent school in Hong Kong, offered to help him with his English.

"Why didn't you go to Hong Kong University?" he asked her one day. "You wouldn't have had trouble with your English."

She looked at him as though to say: We wouldn't have met if I had done that. But he was probably overrating himself.

Then, one day, they decided to go to the Chaplaincy.

"I'll watch you lose to Father Liu again," she said.

"I want to show you something else," said Father Liu when he came out to meet them. "Come with me."

He took them into the room at the end of the corridor, and in a corner of this seldom-used dusty room, under a window, was an upright piano.

"Do you play?" asked the priest, looking from one to the other.

"No," said Waihung, shaking his head. There had been a piano in the primary school he'd attended, but apart from the teacher no one was permitted to touch it. One of his friends had explored its shiny surface and left a finger mark, and he could still remember the painful afternoon when the teacher was determined to find the culprit. She had, he remembered gleefully, failed to do so.

Margaret said nothing, but walked to the piano, opened it and played several exploratory scales. Father Liu drew up a chair behind her.

"Here's someone who can play."

"No. I'm not very good. I haven't touched a piano for eight months."

But Beethoven and Chopin flowed from her fingers. And soon, he added Brahms and Mozart and others to the music he learned from Margaret.

***

The academic year drew to an end in June, and he finished as top of his class in the end-of-term examinations. Before he left for home, he had a meeting with Hasselbach, who handed him a pile of journals.

"By the autumn I would like you to read the articles I have marked, and I would like to see some notes made as well. I understand you've acquired sufficient English to deal with the reading?" The professor peered at him in the best professorial manner.

He was sure Hasselbach enjoyed doing that, pretending to try to put people off.

"I hope it's been a good year?" Hasselbach added, almost not as a question but as a statement.

"It has, indeed, very much. And thank you, sir."

He saw Margaret and a number of his other friends to the railway station. She was heading for Shanghai, to spend a week with friends before going home to Canton. And then, all of a sudden, he realised that he was going to miss her. He left on the long journey to Canton the next day.

***

Home was pretty much the same as it had been nearly ten months ago. He had written so much about his life in Peking that he thought they would probably no longer feel the urge to ask him any more questions. But they did, and he told them again what he had done since he went away, and the two half-brothers who had gone to Lingnan sounded as though they rather envied him going to Peking. He met Margaret only a couple of times in Canton, where they went to the cinema and had lunch or dinner. Sometimes they simply had tea in a European-type café and walked about, content in each other's company. But after a while, he longed to be back in Peking.

They travelled back together, and managed to secure adjacent cabins on the train. He did a lot less reading this time.

And it was almost with a shock that he realised that he was no longer a freshman, and that there were people who were going to experience for the first time what he had done twelve months ago. Then, one morning in December, as he and Margaret took their short walk to the Chemistry building, which they were now doing regularly, they burst out laughing at what they saw. A new group of southerners were pelting one another with their first snowballs, as they had done the year before.

One day, at the beginning of the second semester, Hasselbach detained him after an unusually long lecture. He had been hoping to dash off to meet Margaret, who would be waiting in the canteen. He was annoyed, and only reluctantly followed the professor

to his room.

"I won't keep you long," said Hasselbach. "I know it's lunch time, but I've been trying to catch you in the last few days."

And I always shot off like an arrow.

"Have you had any serious career plans yet?"

"Not really," he said. He shrugged. "I don't really know what's on offer."

"We can talk about that another time. But I would like you to keep in mind the possibility of a higher degree in England, perhaps, or in America?"

"You… you think I'm good enough for it?"

"You will be in another two and a half years if you are not going to fall away."

He thought for a moment. "I'll have to ask my father, you know."

"You think there may be a problem with money?"

"No… It isn't money."

"If there is, there are ways of getting round that. There are research fellowships and such that will allow to you pursue your studies. Anyway, think about it."

The problem was not so much his father. Or money.

"I thought you weren't going to come," Margaret said as he took the seat next to her. The two girls who were sitting opposite chatting with her rose to go.

"See you at the lecture," Margaret called, and they turned round to wave before disappearing through the canteen doors.

"Sorry to be late," he said. "Hasselbach wanted to see me."

"Something exciting?"

He told her, and they both fell silent.

"Well done," she said. Her voice was barely above a whisper. "Congratulations."

She felt guilty: she should have been so happy for him. Was she becoming possessive?

A shadow had fallen between them, which only slowly lifted, but

by spring, things had returned to normal. Then, one day, in summer, she was packing up after a picnic in the forecourt of a desolate, disused temple in the countryside that they had cycled to. The altar was empty; the statue of the Buddha had been taken away. Grass and weeds were growing between the flagstones. He suddenly became very still. She looked at him.

"Anything the matter?" she asked.

"No," he said. "It's just that I'm going to be a Catholic."

"Would you believe it if I said I could see it coming?"

"Could you?"

Margret ignored the question, but had one of her own. "But why? What did Father Liu say?"

"I don't think I was ever an atheist." He grinned. "In spite of Meiching, my sister-in-law. I reckoned that there has got to be something more than this world around us… Oh, I can't really explain! I only know that unless I take the step now, I shall probably regret it. A lot of what Father Liu stands for makes sense," he concluded.

"And Father Liu?"

"Caution, he says. I'm to think about it and tell him when we come back in September. Also, I'm to read some of the books he's given me. And you, did you never think of becoming one with all your years with the nuns in Hong Kong?"

She shook her head. "Can't say I did. It's funny, isn't it, that it should be you."

***

That summer, they travelled back to Canton together, and he stayed with her family for a few days in their modern flat overlooking the Pearl River before returning home. He met her parents and her two brothers. They took him to a recital given by an Austrian pianist from Hong Kong. Their families couldn't have been more different, he thought. And then he and Margaret made a short visit to the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, the 'Stone House', this time not just

to gaze at its architecture. The building was beginning to mean something more than just stone and mortar now.

"Are you going to tell your people?" she asked when they left the church.

"I've been thinking about it," he said. "I've got a half-brother who is a Protestant, and his wife is also one. I wouldn't be sure he didn't become one just to get married, actually. Anyway, you see, my people are used to the idea of having a Christian in the family. But, somehow, I feel this is more than just… just becoming a Christian."

He was by no means certain, in fact, he had no idea at all, what else the step might lead to. It was perhaps much wiser not to mention it until it was a fait accompli. And for a moment, he was oblivious of her. She gave him an anxious look, and then deliberately, and perhaps symbolically, took possession of his arm. That brought him round, and he looked at her and smiled.

At home, they found him somewhat withdrawn, and they put it down to his vacation work. But he was with them on their usual outings, and went with his mother to lay flowers on the family graves, as he had missed the Ching Ming visit to the cemetery because he was away. Then Margaret came and stayed for a few days, and they were at first very polite, but soon she had captivated them.

"Why are you called Margaret?" Meiching asked her one day. "Are you a Christian?"

"No. I just fancied the name. It means 'pearl', which is what my Chinese name means."

His reception into the Church in the baroque Chapel at the Chaplaincy took place a few days before Christmas, and it was attended by some of the friends he had made there. And, of course, Margaret.

"I baptise thee, Paul," said Father Liu as he leaned over the baptismal font.

Margaret had asked him why he took 'Paul' as his Christian baptismal name.

“I like the idea of the Road to Damascus, where the original Paul was converted by a flash of light. You know, Father Liu is the ‘flash of light’ for me! Also, I want to be called after Paul Hsi, or Zi, the one Father Liu told us about last year.”

There was a small reception afterwards, in the lecture room across the entrance hall.

“Welcome into the fold,” said Hasselbach.

“Thank you, sir.”

“And when is it going to be your turn?” one of Margaret’s girl friends asked her.

“I don’t know,” she said seriously. “I don’t know if I’ll ever be.”

But she went to Midnight Mass at Peking Cathedral with him and the other Catholic students. Afterwards, they returned to the Chaplaincy where they celebrated Christmas with the traditional chicken rice porridge and Christmas cake provided by the Jesuits. Then he walked her back to her hall of residence, and there, standing in the snow under the light over the door, to her surprise, he kissed her for the first time.

“Happy?” he asked her.

She nodded. “Very. And you?”

And she kissed him again.

***

It was strange how things turned out. That Christmas night, with Margaret in his arms, he was prepared to give up his chance of going for a higher degree abroad. In the event, he did give up that opportunity, but for a very different reason. The turning point came a year and four months later, in the spring.

Father Liu always arranged a three-day retreat in Holy Week for both students and staff of the university. Normally the retreats were given at the Chaplaincy, but because of the lack of facilities they had to be non-residential, and the participants returned to the hustle and bustle of ordinary life each evening. This was obviously unsatisfactory. Occasionally, they were able to use the

Franciscan convent, but this year Father Liu had been able to secure accommodation for male students at the Reformed Cistercian, commonly known as Trappist, monastery of Our Lady of Consolation near the village of Yang Chia Ping in the mountains eighty-five miles west of Peking. The place was ideal for a retreat, and it would also give the undergraduates a taste of contemplative life, and give them the opportunity to attend some of the monastic Hours in addition to St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises.

"Unfortunately," he said, "the ladies will still have to come to the Chaplaincy."

Margaret was, of course, not involved. In any case, she had gone to Shanghai for the short spring or Easter break.

They went up in a hired bus, on a cold, misty day. As the driver carefully nosed the bus into the mountains, Waihung – or Paul, now – was reminded of some lines from a poem he had once read:

Into mountains far and cold
The stone path rises steep,
And in the deep of shrouding mists
Quiet homesteads sleep.

It was that first sight of the monastery in the mist which, he decided later, was the turning point. That's where I want to be, he said to himself. Another 'flash of light' moment.

Everything else followed.

The guests were given a guided tour of the monastery on arrival, and, after settling in and a quick tea, the retreat began with an introductory talk in the late afternoon.

"We follow our own timetable," Father Liu told the ten retreatants. "However, I am posting the monastery's timetable on the notice board, as some of you may wish to sample the life here. The Guest Master told me that you are always welcome to join the community in their Office Hours. Provided, of course, they do not clash with our own schedule. However, we do join the monks at their conventual Mass each day. And, by the way, I shouldn't advise anyone to go to

the Night Office: it's at three in the morning. And even Prime is at five thirty. Still, it's up to you…"

Two of them did go to the Night Office, and one of them was Paul. While his friend went back to bed afterwards and did not get up again until half past six, with the others, Paul went to the Chapel for Prime. He was somewhat bleary-eyed when Father Liu gave them their first lecture of the day. Later on, he could recall little of the Spiritual Exercises that Holy Week, but plenty of the monastic Hours he attended. And what he found particularly attractive was the Silence.

"How was the retreat?" Margaret asked when he met her at the railway station. "And what was the monastery like?"

He started to tell her what the monastery was like on the way from the station, and he was still at it when they were having dinner that night in their favourite restaurant.

"It was the best three days in my life," he concluded, but he was not referring to the retreat.

They did not see less of each other this spring and summer, but Margaret noticed that he was frequently very quiet, and even absent-minded.

"Is there anything wrong between the two of you?" one of her friends asked her one day. "You look… pensive, somehow."

"Oh, I'm all right, and there's nothing wrong. Not at all."

He and Margaret again travelled back to Canton together at the end of that third year. This journey was hazardous, as there was active warfare again between the ruling Nationalists and the Communists not many miles from the railway line, in the mountainous region of Kiangsi. Again they were able to book adjacent cabins, and after depositing his suitcase in his own he joined her in hers. After supper, she told him that since Easter she had been seriously exploring the possibility of going on to further studies in America when she graduated.

"I didn't want to tell you until there was something concrete, one

way or the other," she said, not looking at him.

"And…?"

"Michigan is going to give me a place if I get a decent degree."

"That's good. I'm happy for you."

"And you? Will you be going to England, then? Durham, is it?"

He looked out of the window and did not answer for a long moment.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "Probably not. I don't quite know how to tell you this, after all that we have shared together. Sometimes I feel like rather a heel. I think I am going to be a monk at the Cistercian monastery."

Why!? Why!? Why! she screamed in her mind.

"Congratulations," she said, trying to sound normal. "I have been half expecting you to do something like it all this time."

"Really? Since when?" He was curious, but he was also unsure whether she had said it to absolve him.

"Ever since you first went to play chess with Father Liu. You know how much alike the two of you are?"

He shook his head.

"I must admit, though, that I thought you were going to become a Jesuit. This is, I must say, rather surprising. Though," she added after a short pause, "less surprising if I really thought about the enthusiastic way you told me about the monastery after the retreat."

"Well, you knew more than I did!"

"What does Father Liu say?"

"What he said two years ago when I asked him about becoming a Catholic: 'Think carefully' – which is what I have to do now."

"And your people? Have you told them yet?"

"No. I don't know how to either. It might have been easier if my father had been a Catholic, but he isn't, and that makes it impossible."

It was now dark, and they had not switched on the light in the cabin, so he did not see the tears which fell. She was glad when he put his arm round her shoulders, and she sought his hand and held it

until it was time for him to go back to his cabin to go to bed.

He did see more of her this summer. He went up to Canton whenever he could. And they also went back to Peking together. He still had not told his father what plans he was thinking of making. His father did ask him once, though, if he was considering going on to further studies.

"It will depend of how I do next year," he prevaricated.

He was pleasantly surprised by his father's reaction when he eventually wrote to tell him what he was planning to do.

"My son," his father wrote back, "you must make of your own life as you think fit, although I have to admit to a certain disappointment in your decision. Perhaps becoming a Catholic monk carries more prestige than becoming a Buddhist one. However, it is your mother you must convince that what you are going to do is right."

He graduated in the summer of 1935 with a first-class degree in civil engineering. Hasselbach, he could tell, was extremely pleased. The professor was seated on stage with the other members of the university's teaching staff, and was observed to be grinning from ear to ear when the dean of the Engineering Faculty summoned Waihung to receive his diploma, presented by the President of the University. At the same time, Margaret received her diploma: she too had obtained a first-class degree, in Chemistry.

"So when are the two of you going to tie the knot?" the more curious of their friends asked.

Their close friends knew their plans. The others had not been informed.

"We've got our careers to think of first," they replied.

Margaret spent a month at home and then went to Hong Kong to join the ship which would take her to America. He saw her off at the railway station in Canton.

"Goodbye," she said, bravely, as they shook hands. "Good luck, and pray for me."

She kissed him, on the cheek.

“I will,” he said, “if my prayers are worth anything.”

And then, at the beginning of September, he headed once more for Peking. By now, the fighting had shifted far to the west.

***

“Pax Intrantibus,” the letters above the double gate declared in welcome. He had learned enough Latin from Father Liu to understand that it said: “Peace to those who enter.” He pressed the brass knob that was the doorbell. A brother came out of the Porter’s Lodge and opened the gate.

“They’re never locked,” he was told.

He stepped across the threshold and knew somehow that he had come home. If the brother had not been watching, he would have fallen on his knees and kissed the ground. This was 17 September 1935. It was the feast of the Impression of the Stigmata on St Francis of Assisi.

“I’m the new postulant,” he informed the brother.

“We know. We’ve been expecting you. Just knock on the door of the monastery.”

And that night, his first in his new home, with the note of the ‘Salve Regina’, which all monks sing as a sort of ‘goodnight’ to Our Lady, echoing in his ears, before he fell asleep he thought of Margaret. How was she adapting to her new life in America? Could she forgive him for the hurt he must have caused her?

***

He stirred and looked up at the sun again. It seemed to have scarcely moved. Perhaps memory did flash by without account of time. He picked up his rucksack and walked over the stump of wall to the sanctuary of the ruined Chapel.

TWO

Paul settled into his new life without much trouble, although it wasn't easy to get used to rising at two in the morning to sing the Night Office, and at first all he wanted was to go back to bed. He learned to pray, he learned to meditate, he learned to sing the Office and he learned to live in a community: he learned to follow the Rule of St Benedict. And from being a townsman, he learned to be a countryman. He herded the goats of the monastery, learned to milk them and breed them, and learned to make goat's cheese. He tended the vegetable garden, pruned the apricot trees and extracted oil from the fruit which helped to provide valuable income for the monastery: a monastery had to be self-sufficient to survive. And the monastery's tractor was his particular delight.

The months of postulancy passed, and at the end, with his four fellow postulants, he was invested with the white habit of the Cistercians. Father Liu came to attend the occasion.

"You look great in your habit, Paul," he said. "You're a real monk now."

"Not quite," said Paul with a laugh. "I've still got my noviciate to do."

"Of course." And then Father Liu looked quite hard at him. "You are settling down all right?"

"Yes," Paul replied. "It's a great life. I can't wait to make my vows."

"May I offer you a little word of advice?" said Father Liu.

"Yes, please."

"Festina lente. Make haste slowly. Don't spoil things by being over anxious. But, hold firm: I'm sure you are called."

These, as we have seen, were difficult years for China. There had never been peace since the founding of the Republic twenty-five or so years before. Things might have progressed smoothly, with developments in democratic ideas and practices, if an old imperial general, Yuan ShiKai, who had been chosen President of the new republic had not fancied himself in imperial robes instead and decided to turn the clock back by claiming the imperial throne for himself. He didn't last, but he wasn't the last to be dazzled by regal glory. Some years later, the secessionist warlord of Paul's home province of Kwangtung harboured similar royal pretensions. In the meantime, local strong men with their personal armies made casual alliances, and just as casually repudiated them. Singly and in blocs they fought each other as well as the central government under Chiang Kai-shek, who succeeded Dr Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic, as head of state. One interesting character among the warlords was Feng Yu-hsiang, the 'Christian General', who reputedly christened his troops with a hosepipe. He had been converted to Methodism, and ruled his fief and his army according to his ideas of Christian socialism. He was greatly admired by a leading Protestant missionary, and he, in fact, wasn't the first leader in China to claim to fight under the banner of Christ. The leader of the Taiping Rebellion in the nineteenth century had claimed to be the brother of Jesus Christ.

This was the time when the mighty bickered and tried to outplay each other, and the urban middle class aped the lifestyle of the wealthy in Europe and America, and all they seemed to be concerned with were mail-order purchases from Sears and Roebuck, the fashions in Paris, and which were the best nightclubs to go to in Shanghai. This was the time when the common people were being ground under. Their crops were ruined, abandoned or stolen by the warring troops, and they were robbed of their meagre possessions, and even

their modest trinkets and their clothes; their women were violated, and their young men forcibly enrolled in a warlord's army, where they starved and died while their leaders gadded about resplendent in tailored uniforms gleaming with the medals with which they had decorated themselves, and riding on their war horses which were better fed than their troops. Some of them even had imported automobiles as their chariots.

Japan then played a part in the middle of the warlord problem. The Japanese invaded Manchuria, in the north-east, which with its well-watered, fertile agricultural land was regarded as the breadbasket of the country. They set up the puppet state of Manchukuo, and installed the young deposed Manchu emperor Puyi as nominal ruler. Puyi lived a privileged and flamboyant life until the Communists put him in virtual captivity. He spent the rest of his life as a gardener, tending flowers in the old Imperial Palace which had once been his home.

The loss of Manchuria pretty well made Peking a frontier town.

This was the picture of China in the mid-1930s , as Paul was starting his new life. He lived the simple, austere routine of the Cistercians, under the guidance of the ever patient Master of Novices. The memory of Margaret had faded into the background. By the end of the noviciate, he was ready, prepared and eager to enter fully into the life that he had chosen. With two of his fellow novices – two had dropped out – in front of the entire Cistercian community and friends, he made his vows of 'stability, obedience and conversion of manners before God and His Saints'. He would have liked his parents to be there, as the parents of his fellow novices were there to witness their sons take the momentous step. Unfortunately, it was not to be, and in any case they probably wouldn't understand what it was all about, but his father had written to offer his congratulations, and his mother had written to tell him that she would be praying, and offering incense on the family altar for him to be a good monk. Father Liu was there, and his old professor Father Hasselbach, who had travelled up especially for the day. Father Hasselbach had

borrowed the university delivery van for the purpose.

Paul met them at the simple reception afterwards.

"Now you really are a monk!" said Father Hasselbach, as he shook Paul's hand.

"Thank you," said Paul.

"It's interesting how things can turn out, isn't it?" Father Hasselbach went on. "When I first met you, I thought I was training a first-class engineer! And now, look at you… as far from building bridges and aqueducts as one can get!"

"Surely you don't think it's wasted," laughed Paul. "As a matter of fact, I have been using the skills you taught me and am building a road, over the hill there."

He turned and pointed towards a narrow ribbon of white on a distant hillside.

"That will be taking our tractor to our new field on the other side. We are planning another apricot orchard."

"Where do you send the oil?" asked Father Liu.

"Some abroad. A lot of it to Shanghai. I don't know much about it, really. Father Matthew, over there, he's in charge of things like that. You know," he continued after a pause, "we've been praying for the Church in Spain… but Father Abbot doesn't say very much."

"Oh," said Father Hasselbach, "it's a bad business there."

"The Communists have been killing priests and nuns and emptying monasteries and convents," said Father Liu. "Mind you, from what we are told, Franco's lot aren't exactly angels, either."

"It's a topsy-turvy business. Franco's accepting help from Hitler and Mussolini, and that has turned world opinion against him. With friends like those, as they say, who needs enemies!"

"People are thinking that the Germans and the Italians are up to something," said Father Liu. "And Japan…"

The Axis Powers that aimed to dominate the world.

"Let's hope not," said Paul. "We've enough on our hands as things are."

We may try to keep the world from us, he reflected, but the world has a way of getting to us. Being a monk is not a way of escaping the world.

Just as Father Hasselbach was starting the car for the long ride back to Peking, Father Liu turned to Paul.

“Oh, I nearly forgot. I’m supposed to be passing on Margaret’s best wishes.”

“Thanks,” said Paul. “So you keep in touch?”

“Oh, yes. We correspond regularly.”

He had a feeling that Father Liu hadn’t nearly forgotten. He just hadn’t been sure if he ought to pass on the best wishes. Especially not to a new monk? But why not? Margaret was a part of his life, a happy part of his past.

***

Paul’s future in the monastery was partly marked out for him. He was going to be trained for the priesthood, like a number of the monks at Our Lady of Consolation. So after his vows, he embarked on the long road to ordination through the years of Philosophy, which taught him to think and which he enjoyed, followed by Theology, which taught him to ‘know’ God. He discovered that the deeper he delved into the mystery that was God, the more there was to discover. He was to find that it all left him with as many questions as answers.

His mornings were devoted to his studies, and his afternoons to manual labour, from which his intellectual occupation did not excuse him. He had to admit to himself that he was perhaps happiest with the tractor, a rather ancient piece of machinery, donated by some American benefactor who had little idea of how difficult it was, in the backwaters of the barren hills behind Peking, to obtain spares. The machine now required fairly constant, loving attention, although when it did work, it almost performed miracles. And then, whenever the monastery needed anything done with concrete and stones and rubble, he was the man they called on.

In addition to their own cloistered life, the monks of Consolation,

at the behest of the bishop, also ministered to the surrounding areas. There were a number of villages, some large and some small, scattered around the monastery, with a Catholic population. There were even whole villages whose population was Catholic, and one of them had suffered martyrdom less than a hundred years before during one of the endemic periods of persecution under the Manchu emperors. The monastery's priests would take turns to go out on a Sunday to say Mass in the villages, some of which had a small church or Chapel; and where there wasn't one, Mass would be said in the home of a villager with a room, or a barn, large enough to accommodate a dozen or so worshippers. If the distance to travel was long, the priest would stay at the home of a villager the night before. Monks would also be sent out to prepare people for baptism, for First Communion, for Confirmation or for marriage, and not infrequently to perform weddings. Therefore, in fact, the community of Consolation also did the duties of parish priests.

Initially, Paul was assigned a small catechetics group which met in one of the spare rooms in the monastery. And then, one day, Father Michael, the Prior, summoned Paul.

"You are being assigned to Father Stephen for the Sunday Masses rota around the villages. Father Stephen will start saying Mass at the church at Lungchuan again this coming Sunday. We're re-opening the little church there. Do you know where it is?"

"Not really, Father… Well, no."

"It's further up in the hills, and it's a longish walk." The Prior looked sidelong at Paul. "You are fit, aren't you?"

"Yes, Father." Paul smiled. "I've just been passed by Dr Kung." As 'A1', he thought to himself, but he'd not say that.

"I'm sure you are all right. If Mrs Chang could make it down here to Mass with her bound feet, and at least twice your age, you should be all right."

Paul wasn't sure if Father Michael was being a little facetious, but Maria Chang was a real character. Like many women of her

generation, she had had her feet bound for a time when she was a tiny girl, and though they were no longer bound, it had permanently damaged her feet. By all accounts she was a beauty, and had many suitors, especially as she came from a well-to-do family. It took her a while to make up her mind, and she eventually picked a young army officer, Chang, who happened to be a Catholic. So to marry him, she became a Catholic herself. And she didn't just become a Catholic, she became a very devout and active Catholic. She used to walk down to the Abbey, on her damaged feet, to attend Mass at least three times a week; the monks always wondered how she managed it.

"It's like walking down the mountain on stilts, but more painful," someone said. "And then going back up, all on the same day!"

"And three times a week!"

Then just before Paul entered Consolation she offered to become a catechist, and she spent even more time at the monastery. By then, sadly, her husband had died, of malaria, while on campaign against the Communists in the mosquito-infested jungles of Yunnan in south-west China.

When Mass started being said at Lungchuan again, Maria Chang stopped coming down to the Abbey on Sundays, although she was still a frequent visitor on weekdays. She also had her duties as catechist, and she held classes when it was convenient for her pupils to attend. With the opening of the small turn-of-the-century church in her village, Mrs Chang had assumed the duty of sacristan, laid out the vestments, and loaded the ciborium and filled the wine and water vessels. She was so reliable that the priests decided to leave the vestments and chalice in her care. As she came to know Paul better, she started to take an interest in his progress, and she told him often that if the Abbot knew what was good for the monastery, he should ordain him right away! Maria Chang wasn't afraid of speaking her mind. Paul found her a little overpowering.

Another friend Paul made was the monastery's doctor, Matthew Kung. The doctor came from a wealthy, old Catholic family, going

back perhaps three centuries or more to the end of the Ming dynasty, when the Jesuits first came to China. He had received his medical training in France, and could have stayed on in the West, but he elected to return home to serve his own people. Some wondered if his name 'Kung' had any significance, and there were rumours that he was a direct descendant of Confucius, in Chinese 'Master Kung'.

"Look," he would say, when anyone brought the subject up, "everyone in China can claim to be descended from some duke or other in the Shang, or the Chou dynasty, two and a half thousand years ago. 'What's in a name?'" he'd conclude, quoting Shakespeare.

Shakespeare was 'big' in China. Everyone knew about him, as they knew about Beethoven. 'Sar-si-pei-ah', they called him.

Dr Kung drove up twice a year, and whenever he was needed, to check on the health of the community. He'd stay several days, as there were nearly a hundred monks in the monastery. While he was at Yang Chia Ping, the villagers around would bring their sick to the monastery, where he would treat them for free. Some of his patients insisted on paying him: quite often, he would be returning to Peking with a couple of well-fed chickens in the back of his bus-sized Citroën in lieu of payment. Not infrequently, he also carried some sick person to the hospital in Peking.

Dr Kung used to say to Paul every time he gave him his physical, "In spite of your slight frame, you are as strong as an ox. How do you manage it?"

On 8 July 1937, not long after Paul had made his vows, the monks as usual gathered in Chapter for their daily conference. The Abbot, instead of dealing with matters arising from the concerns of the monastery, began Chapter by delivering startling news.

"I have been told," the Abbot, who had the reputation of being unflappable, informed the community, in his usual quiet manner, "that as from yesterday China and Japan are, as it were, officially at war. Japan opened hostilities on Marco Polo bridge near Tientsin."

China had been on a virtual war footing with Japan since 1931,

when the latter invaded Manchuria, arousing strong anti-Japanese feelings in the country. These feelings were exacerbated by Japan's bombardment of Shanghai in the following year. The incident resulted in the Japan's isolation of Japan on the international stage, and for a while she held back, biding time. Some people blamed Chiang Kai-shek's preoccupation with the Communists for his not taking a strong line with Japanese aggression. In addition to all this, there had already been long-term resentment against Japan since Peking's port, Tientsin, had been assigned to Japanese control at the beginning of the century after the trouble of the Boxer Rebellion, when China had defied the world and failed dismally. So no one in the community was surprised at this development, but the news was no less startling for all that.

Then Paul had a letter from his mother. This was nothing special, as she had been writing to him almost every week. She could not write herself, and so all her letters came in the hand of one of Paul's half-sisters. This letter, however, screamed panic.

"Are you all right? Are you safe? Will you be coming home? Your brothers are talking about joining up!"

Paul wrote back: "I'm all right. I'm safe. No, I shan't be coming home. Things are pretty quiet around here." He wasn't at all sure that the letter would calm his mother's nerves.

In the next few weeks, Japan had taken control of the area around Tientsin and Peking, and was making a drive for Nanking, the then capital of China on the Yangtze River. Shanghai was again assaulted, with European troops, mainly British, looking on and cheering the Chinese from the neutral zone of the International Settlement, and refugees flooded into the foreign enclave to escape the fighting. Chiang Kai-shek, however, had reserved some of his best troops for the defence of Shanghai, and the Japanese troops did not have an easy time. Eventually they broke through, and then made for Nanking. But the Chinese government had moved to the safety of the vastness of Szechuan, in the upper reaches of the Yangtze, in south-

western China. Chungking was now the wartime capital of China.

Then came news of the fall of Nanking. And the horrific massacre that followed.

"They beheaded people for fun," Father Abbot told Chapter.

At the beginning, life went on as normal in Yang Chia Ping. They saw no Japanese and the villagers continued to till their fields. The monks carried on with work on their farms, and Paul and his fellows students applied their minds to their philosophical studies. They held debates and symposia on Aquinas and Aristotle and modern philosophers like Nietzsche. Paul became interested in the rather discredited Plato. He accompanied Father Stephen to Lungchuan and elsewhere on Sunday mornings, and as time went on, he was given the task of supervising Maria Chang, whose theology was sometimes shaky.

One day, while Paul was on his way to one of the monastery's outlying farms, he fell in with a young couple he recognised. They had been coming to Sunday Mass at the monastery for as long as Paul remembered.

"Morning, Father," said the man.

It wasn't much use telling the man that he was some way from being a 'Father'. For most people, anyone in a monk's habit, or in a cassock, was a priest.

"Morning, Simon," he replied. "Morning, Magdalene."

"Yes, Father," said Simon, answering Paul's unspoken question. "Actually, I told Father Seraphin on Sunday. We finally made up our mind to leave."

"But where are you going?"

"Well, almost anywhere. We reckon that we can't live here anymore," said Simon, half waving his arm at the landscape. "I've a cousin who lives down Yangchong way. Yangchong's still free, and we'll stay there for a while. We're heading for Lichuan tonight… that's about fifteen miles away, then Wuling the day after, then…"

Paul understood. So far, the ruling hand of the Japanese on the

area had been light, but most people felt uneasy living under alien occupation.

Paul looked at the suitcase in the man's hand, and the lighter bundle in the woman's. Simon also had a heavy-looking backpack slung over his shoulder.

"What about the rest of your stuff? And how are you going to live?"

"We live in a rented house, anyway," said Simon. "We've left our furniture with Magdalene's parents. They say they are too old to move away."

"Simon's a carpenter," said Magdalene. "And I can always wash clothes."

"We'll find work. And we've got some savings we are taking with us. You know, our neighbours already left. They are heading for that Communist place in… Shensi, I think. We are heading for Szechuan. The Japanese will never get there."

"But we'll be back!" he called as they moved away. "When we've won the war!"

Paul wished the couple luck, for, he told himself, they needed luck. He also said a quiet prayer for them.

Paul discovered that more people were moving away. Some of them were young couples, like Simon and Magdalene. But there were also families, couples with children. Some travelled lightly, others wheeled their belongings in a wheelbarrow. Every Sunday, the number of people who came to Mass went down, slowly.

Then one day, the Abbot sent for Paul.

"Your old mentor, Father Liu," Father Abbot told him, "will be coming up from Peking in a couple of days with five people. They will be staying for a while with us before going on. What I want you to do, since you know Father Liu well, is to take care of them while they are with us. They can stay in the guest house. Make sure that the rooms are made ready. Father Liu may, if he wishes, stay with the community, so get one of the empty cells prepared. On the other

hand, he may wish to eat his meals with his group. In any case, make sure that meals are sent over."

Paul waited to be dismissed.

"I'll leave things in your capable hands," the Abbot said.

Father Liu and his group did not arrive the next day, nor the day after. However, the group appeared the day after that, a little before Sext. They had come up on the familiar charcoal-burning bus with the rickety chimney exhaust, and looked weary after the long ride.

Brother Porter brought them to Paul, who showed them to their quarters.

"Would you like to use the washroom before lunch?" he asked. "Lunch will be sent over after Sext which will be starting about now."

The group wanted to attend Sext.

"I hope you won't find it boring," Paul said. "It will take only about twenty minutes."

He led them into the Chapel just as the Abbot intoned, "*Deus, in adjutorium meum intende*" – *O God, come unto my aid.*

Paul was given permission to have lunch with Father Liu and his group, and to spend the afternoon with Father Liu.

"You know," Father Liu began, "that because of the situation the university was not reopened after the summer holidays, and it seems that it won't reopen again as long as the Japanese are in occupation. In fact, a lot of the professors simply disappeared. A number of the students came to me because I was involved in the Chaplaincy, as you know." He broke off from what he was saying. "And you know, Paul, that Father Hasselbach has gone back to Shanghai."

They were worried about their future, and even if the university reopened, few of them wanted to carry on under Japanese occupation.

"I for one," said a second year medical student, "don't want to start every day singing the Japanese national anthem!"

"That's what they have to do now," said another, who should have been starting his third year in Chemistry, "in primary and

secondary schools."

"And they have to learn Japanese!"

They discussed the problem long and hard, and made their momentous decision. They would head inland, perhaps to Wuhan on the Yangtze. Surely it was far enough inland to be secure from the invaders. They consulted Father Liu.

Father Liu had plans of his own. So far, the Japanese had been leaving religious organisations and places of worship alone. But, like other Chinese people, he was not by any means comfortable living under occupation. Eventually he discussed his problem with Father Tauziat. The Superior was sympathetic, and in fact suggested a role Father Liu could play. Why did he not go to Wuhan, or perhaps Chungking, to establish a Chaplaincy for refugee students not just from Peking, but from Shanghai, Nanking, and other Chinese universities? To this Father Liu readily agreed. And started to make plans.

"What sort of money will you be planning to take with you?" asked Father Tauziat.

"Chinese," said Father Liu.

"I suggest you take American dollars as well. I'll authorise the withdrawal."

This was when the five university friends visited Father Liu, who persuaded them to aim for Chungking rather than Wuhan. They decided to stay for a few days at Consolation, to gather strength, as it were, before launching themselves into the unknown. Their one worry was how to get across Japanese into unoccupied China, but in this they were helped by the sheer size of China, and Japan's preoccupation with the drive on Nanking. They had hoped that once Nanking, the seat of the Chinese government before the war, fell into their hands, Chinese resistance would collapse. However, Japan never had enough troops to patrol properly even the areas under their control, and travellers seldom had any difficulty passing from occupied into free territory, or the other way round.

Four days after their arrival at Consolation, the guests said goodbye to the monastery.

On the morning of the departure, the travellers rose before daylight. Father Liu said Mass in the guest house, which was also attended by Paul, who had, of course, been up since two. They had oatmeal porridge for breakfast, and then they were off.

They aimed to do thirty miles that first day.

The late September morning broke rain-washed pale, bright and cold, but it was a good day for walking. While similar groups often hired porters, this company carried their own luggage, a suitcase or a haversack each, for they needed to be careful with their limited resources. It had been a wrench to leave their books behind, but their hope was that their parents would post them on when they arrived at Chungking. The surprising thing about those war years was that the post was never interrupted and passed freely through the country. Neither warring government wanted to disrupt it.

So they set off, though not with a song on their lips, or in their hearts. The mood was sombre. They were not unique, nor were they the first, for they were only five among thousands, maybe even millions, of secondary, college and university students who traversed wartime, and war-torn, China with their teachers and their schools, braving hardship, danger and the possibility of death, seeking intellectual and political freedom. Many sold personal possessions at a fraction of their real worth to finance their journey, and not unusually, families uprooted themselves for the education of their children. The Japanese despised the Chinese for what they considered to be a lack of martial spirit. They were much mistaken, and that was why they failed to subdue China, which stood alone against them for four years.

And so it was that Paul, that autumn morning, said goodbye to Father Liu. Would they meet again? Paul wasn't at all sure.

Father Liu promised to write.

***

"I've heard from Father Liu," Paul told Father Abbot in early spring. "They've arrived in Chungking."

"That's good news," said the Abbot.

"The bishop's appointed him Catholic chaplain to the University of Chungking as well as to the University of Chengdu."

"And the boys?"

"They've settled in, apparently. Three of their parents have managed to send them money, but for how long, before the Japanese get wise to it, no one can say."

"How about the other two? How do they get by?"

Paul smiled at the ingenuity of it.

"They sell blood to the hospital, which pays very well, it seems. They do it every other week, and they live on the money, and in the meantime the body replenishes the lost amount."

Father Abbot was concerned. "How long can they keep it up, though?"

"I don't suppose anybody knows."

Father Abbot changed the subject. "Does anyone know how many Peking boys have followed?"

Paul spread his hands. "I couldn't say, Father."

"I've kept a count," said the Abbot, "from my sources. It seems there have been another twenty or so from Peking, alone."

"Oh," Paul just remembered to add, "Father Liu is learning to ride a motorbike, so he can get between the two towns more easily."

Father Abbot raised his eyebrows. "I hope he knows what he is doing!"

That evening, at Vespers, the community said a thanksgiving for the safe arrival of Father Liu and his group. The Chapel rang with the simple melody of the *Te Deum*.

***

Paul looked from the ruins of the Porter's Lodge to the ruins of the monastery Chapel. There wasn't much of it left. As he made his way there, he came across the rusted remains of his beloved tractor.

Somehow it had got moved from its shed to the herb garden, which of course was now overgrown with weeds. Then his mind went back to those war years…

***

One day, the occupation forces discovered Yang Chia Ping.

They came on a windy late October afternoon, during the hour of post- prandial siesta for the Cistercian community, which was meant to compensate for their early rising in the small hours of the morning. Most of the monks, however, used the time for reading, or study, or for catching up with work. Paul was preparing for the discussion on Kant he was to take part in. He was, in fact, struggling with Kant, whom he found difficult to comprehend.

On this day the wind came whistling down the bare valley, across the fields and pastures and the orchards of the monastery, through the main street of the village, whipping up mini dust storms and what was left of the dead leaves from long-bare trees. The troop carrier rolled into the village square, with its complement of twenty soldiers under the command of an officer, and halted in front of the temple. It was watched by adults with trepidation, from behind windows. A few children, as yet unacquainted with fear or caution, and full of curiosity, watched from open doorways. Some of them were called back indoors by anxious parents.

The officer alighted from his place by the driver, and the troops jumped down from the rear of the carrier. They were confident, at ease and unsuspicious. Some of them carried their long rifles with them, others came down without. They wandered about the square, looked through doorways if they were open, calling to each other in their staccato language which no one in Yang Chia Ping understood. Except for one man, who was obviously Chinese, in civilian clothes, who was willy or nilly their interpreter. On this occasion, he had nothing to do.

One of the soldiers decided that he needed to relieve himself. He went behind a bush next to the temple. His friends laughed at

the noise he made.

Then they all got back onto the carrier, which was driven up the road to the monastery gates. The porter saw them coming and came out to watch. The officer stood up in his place, and peered through the wrought ironwork at the buildings. Then he noticed the metal cross on top of the gate.

The interpreter was summoned from the back of the carrier. He listened to the officer, then turned to the porter.

"The officer wants to know what kind of place this is."

The porter pointed to the metal plaque on the gatepost.

"This is a Catholic monastery," he informed the interpreter, keeping an eye on the officer. "Cistercian."

The interpreter passed the information on to the officer. The porter wasn't sure whether 'Cistercian' meant anything to him.

"How many are you inside?"

"Seventy-six."

"Are they Chinese?" The interpreter translated the next question.

"Mostly. There are a few Europeans. And one Canadian." Brother Porter was meticulous.

Without another word, the officer sat down; the interpreter got back onto the carrier. The driver made a three-point turn and drove back down to the village. The porter watched it take the turning to the next village.

"Hm! They are full of themselves," the porter muttered to himself.

This diminutive force made its circuit of the surrounding villages, confident that it would not be interfered with. The Chinese had no guts. They did not have the courage or the will to fight back. If they did, how was it that the Japanese imperial forces were able to conquer Manchuria without resistance, could control so much of the country in so short a time? Apart from the battle of Shanghai. They did show some guts then, but they did not last long, did they?

Still, it was better to be safe. So the occupying troops made a

weekly circuit of the district. They did not do it on the same day each week, in case the locals were going to be up to something. Just to be safe.

They did it for a joke. Every time they came to Yang Chia Ping, one of them would be detailed to relieve himself behind the bush by the temple. That was good for a laugh. And then they would pass on to the next village.

***

The symposium went well. Paul held his own, in Latin, as Kant, and St Thomas Aquinas, represented by one of his fellow philosophers, did not have an easy time. He was nearing the end of the accelerated philosophy course, and he was looking forward to starting his theological studies, again accelerated, so that he would complete the normal seven-year course in four. He was going to have Father Augustine again, which was an excellent thing. Though he did go on a bit at times!

In addition to helping Father Stephen on Sundays, Paul had been given the task of visiting families in Yang Chia Ping. Every two weeks or so, we would pay a visit, usually rather brief but occasionally extended, to a family in the village, whether the family was Catholic or not. In those harsh years of the war, he learned about their life, their work, their joys and sorrows, and their problems. Quite often, he found it difficult to stand back, to look at their hard life dispassionately. Where he could, he would help, or at least the monastery would.

In time, the Japanese took to entering people's houses. Most of them were still polite, but certain others demanded to see the family jewels and other objects a family deemed precious. These might be of a pair of silver earrings, or a jade statuette of the goddess Kuanyin, passed down through the family for generations. Others openly demanded money.

At one visit Paul made to the village the day after the Japanese had been, he found the family in distress. The man, who was usually

reticent, was even more so than normal, but he also looked angry. His wife, with their three children about her, was in tears. At first, they refused to tell him what the problem was. But at last…

“They took all our money.”

“They? How many of them were there?”

“Actually, just one.”

Just one, or a thousand, the result would have been the same.

“Did he threaten you?”

“No, he didn’t. He just said: ‘Give me all your money.’”

And the soldier took all their money, including their small change.

“Did many of the other soldiers know?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps.”

Another thought struck Paul. “Have you any food?” he asked.

“We’ve still got some rice, and some cabbage. And a bit of salt fish. We were going to do some shopping today, but…”

Later in the day, Paul brought some food and some money for the family, but he knew that these would not solve the problem.

When the Japanese came for their next visit, Paul, with the permission of the Abbot, was ready for them. He had also managed to find a brother who spoke some Japanese. He was Brother Hilary. Paul had posted a villager at a spot which overlooked the approach road into the village. He was to run up to the monastery when the Japanese troop carrier was sighted.

The warning came during the hour of the siesta, but Paul was ready. His heart was beating faster than he liked, but he forced himself to calm down.

Paul and Brother Hilary reached the village square just as the Japanese drove into it, and they waited at the entrance to the temple, because that was where the vehicle usually stopped.

When the officer saw the monks, he and his interpreter came up to them.

“We don’t normally see you in the village,” he said. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

By then the troops had all come down off the carrier, and were standing about with their long rifles, almost as tall as most of them, in their hands.

“I have a complaint to make,” Paul said through his interpreter.

The officer raised his eyebrows in question.

“The last time you were here,” said Paul, “one of your men entered a house and robbed the family of all the cash they had.”

The soldiers suddenly stopped their chatter. The officer folded his arms, then spread his right hand.

“So where is the man who was robbed?” he asked.

“He’s too scared to come out; so I am speaking for him.”

Paul did not really expect any worthwhile response from the officer, and he was surprised when he fired a series of questions at his men. They shifted uneasily, looked at one another, and then began to edge away from one man. Eventually, this man was standing alone.

“So you are the one? LOOK AT ME!”

The man looked up, and nodded.

“I want to hear you say it!”

“That was me,” the man stammered.

“You are a disgrace to the Japanese Imperial Army! Which house did you rob?”

The man pointed.

The officer strode into the house and brought the family, the man, his wife and their children, to the door. The soldier turned to face them.

“Is this the man?” the officer asked.

“Yes.”

The officer took his revolver from its holster and shot the thief in the back of the head. Blood and brain sprayed the dust of the square. The man fell forward amid the screams of the woman and the children, twitched, and was still.

The other men fetched a tarpaulin from the troop carrier, wrapped the body in it and put it in the carrier. Then they all got

back on board.

The officer turned to the shaken monks, bowed, and got back on the vehicle, which then drove off. They had left the blood and the brain in the dust for the villagers to clean up.

Paul couldn't sleep that night. He kept seeing the dead man and the blood and the brain in the dust. He sang the Night Office in a dream. He prayed for the repose of the dead man's soul. How responsible was he for the man's death?

Justice? Was it for justice that he did what he did?

If he managed to keep awake in the morning, if he managed to keep his mind on the intricacies of Aristotle and St Augustine, it was because his conscience, at the back of his mind, refused to let him doze off. However, time was a healer, and so was the calming wisdom of the Abbot, who understood what he did better than himself.

Peace of a sort had returned to Yang Chia Ping when Paul began his theological studies, again under Father Augustine. The Japanese made their usual round once a week, but what was unusual now was that the soldiers were much subdued; they no long barked questions at each other. The offensive ritual relief of the bladder stopped. After they had got off the troop carrier, the soldiers would stand in small groups, rifles in their hands, and speak in soft voices, as though they had become more wary of the villagers.

"It's almost worse than before," one of the villagers who came to Mass at the Abbey confessed one Sunday. "They're going to kill us, you know."

"You can see they don't trust us anymore," said another, when Paul paid him his own weekly visit. "Not that I expect them to trust us: I never trusted them anyhow, what with all those rumours about them we hear. Tea, Father?"

He had tried so many times to explain that he was not yet a 'Father'. They seemed never to have heard!

"'Brother'. Don't let it escalate into something worse, though,"

said Paul, as he sipped his scalding cup of tea. "Don't let it get worse."

In reply, the man tousled the hair of his small daughter, who was leaning against his knee.

"You haven't said 'good day' to Father Paul yet," the man told his daughter.

"Good day, Father," the little girl said quietly.

"Your son," said Paul after a short pause. "How old is he?"

"Daniel, he is eleven. He should be going to school. But in times like these, I don't want him walk the two miles to the high school in Hanlei. But he is going to Mr Gao at the end of the village."

Mr Gao was an old scholarly type who gave lessons in the classics for a pittance. He had a good reputation, Paul heard. He was a real conservative and traditional type and thought learning Science was a waste of time. Nor did he approve of Christian missionaries. "What do we have to learn from them? What can they teach us?" he used to say.

Paul was determined that, one day, he was going to meet Mr Gao.

Then one Sunday, in the depth of winter, after Mass at Lungchuan, Maria Chang came up as he was helping Father Stephen to put away the vestments and the chalice and the Missal.

"Brother Paul," she said, "we are in trouble."

"Yes?"

"We, the village, I mean, are going to run out of food, some time, if something isn't done, somehow."

"How?"

Life was hard here in the mountains north-west of Peking, in the province of Hopei, at the best of times. The lack of flat agricultural land, the shortage, generally, of water, the scarcity of pasture, made it a difficult place out of which to make a living. The monks were able to cultivate the land profitably because they had the means to organise their resources, because they diversified and had more useful contacts than the local farmers. And every autumn, the

harvest was crucial. It had to be carefully hoarded, carefully doled out, if it was to last the winter.

And then groups of strangers came among them. They came with rifles on their shoulders and revolvers in their belts, and some were even armed with old sabres. They declared themselves to be the Resistance.

"Do you love your country?" they demanded. "We are fighting the Japanese. We are, in fact, fighting for you, for us all. It is your duty to give us your support. We'll need arms, and food, and perhaps even recruits."

"So what do you want now?" asked a rather suspicious villager.

"At the moment, we need food. We'll welcome anything you can spare."

The grain was held in a communal granary in the precinct of the village temple. The village elder was fetched.

"We need to hold a meeting to decide how much we can spare for you. Come back this afternoon."

The strangers duly returned in the afternoon and were given a generous measure of barley, which the villagers had harvested earlier in the year. For the winter. A couple of the younger members of the village also decided that they should join the freedom fighters. Unfortunately for Lungchuan, this wasn't the only group which demanded their support. Nor so politely.

"But we have already given a lot of our food to the group who came last week!" the village elder protested.

"Are you sure they were a genuine patriotic group?" the leader of the new group asked, hefting his rifle.

"We can't keep giving our food away!" wailed the village elder.

"Look! I don't care if you can or not, we need food. Some of us haven't eaten for a couple of days. So where do you keep your rice? Or barley? Or wheat?"

This second group, though smaller in number, actually went away with more than the first.

“It’s not just us, this village. It’s happening all round the countryside. The other day, Hsichiachuang, five miles down the road, was actually robbed,” said Maria.

“Yeah,” said a man who was putting the chairs away. “They not only took food. They went through every house in the village looking for money and valuables.”

“They’re as bad as the Japs.”

“Worse! They’re supposed to be our own people!”

“What can we do? If we fight them, we’ll be accused of helping the enemy. If we don’t, we’ll starve.”

To the surprise of most people, the only group that paid for their requisitions were the Communists. Their reputation rose. But they also introduced a scorched earth policy in areas they did not control. One day, one of the Communist groups came to the monastery. They demanded to see the Abbot.

“We know you have firearms,” the leader said.

That was no secret. They had been donated to the monastery to fight off bandits. Somehow the villagers felt safer because of it. What they didn’t know was that none of the monks could use them, and some of them were beginning to rust.

And before the Abbot could say anything…

“We want them.”

They were handed over. This in fact proved to be a piece of luck.

The situation rapidly worsened for the villages. What they lost most, of course, was what they needed most: food. The demands grew more frequent; the amounts demanded also rose, often to unbearable levels. In the barren time of winter, they saw their hard-saved stores dwindling. Nor was it just food they lost: implements were requisitioned, clothes were taken. And there was nothing that the ordinary people could do. Eventually, many communities became dependent on the monastery for subsistence.

Although the country round Yang Chia Ping was quiet, and the occupying power had an easy time, there were guerrilla activities

in more remote areas. Here, a small Japanese outpost had been attacked. There, a Japanese column on the move had been ambushed. Elsewhere, a lone Japanese soldier who had strayed had been lynched. The Japanese began to be jittery, and the local population learned to keep their heads down. The patrols increased in frequency, and in strength.

One grey, cold January day, a Japanese patrol in two troop carriers stopped briefly as usual at Yang Chia Ping before moving on to the next village. The road led into a narrow, dry valley, overlooked by steep banks on either side. The patrol was ambushed. The first shots slightly wounded several of the troops, but neither driver was hurt, and they were able to get to the end of the valley where it broadened out. The carriers were stopped and the soldiers fanned out along the valley. By the time they moved back to where they were first attacked, the ambushers had melted away into the bare hills further up the valley. News of the attack quickly spread over the area.

"They will come back," everybody predicted.

And they came back, the very next day. They came back in punitive force, in several troop carriers, with mounted machine guns next to the driver and others facing aft. The company was no longer commanded by a lowly lieutenant, or even a captain, but by a major. Accompanied by the usual interpreter.

This time they turned everyone out of the houses. Stoically, the villagers lined up in front of them. The men were then separated from their families and led to the centre of the square, and children started crying, desperately hushed by their mothers.

"The Japanese Imperial forces," the major began through a loudhailer. His words were translated by the interpreter. However, as the interpreter did not have a loudhailer, the words were not as impressive as they were intended to be. "The Japanese Imperial forces have so far been extremely lenient and considerate to you, but this kindness, this consideration, was obviously misplaced. It is most fortunate for you that, in spite of the attack yesterday, none of

my soldiers has died."

He paused, and signalled to his sergeant, who in turn barked an order to his men. Three of the villagers were pulled out and made to stand on their own.

"Look at them," the officer ordered his men. "Remember their faces."

He then turned to the villagers.

"Next time my men are attacked, within five miles of this village, these three men die. And," he continued, "from now on, every time we come, I want you to stand outside your houses. If there is a man missing, I shall want to know where he's gone."

The men of the village were sent back to their families, and a count of each household was made before the villagers were allowed to go back into their houses.

But the Japanese had not finished with Yang Chia Ping yet.

The convoy left the village, but instead of taking the road to the next village, it again drove up to the monastery. The officer demanded entrance to the monastery grounds. The porter opened the gates and the convoy streamed in. The Abbot, accompanied by Brother Hilary, met the officer at the entrance to the monastic buildings.

"I have to search the monastery and the surrounding countryside," said the officer without preamble, "for terrorists. As the search will take some time, I shall need to set up camp here for the night. Perhaps we shall cause least disturbance to you if we set up our tents over… there." He indicated the apricot orchard, where the trees were bare of leaves in the winter, and where there was also a well.

The Abbot signified his consent.

"My men will search the grounds," the officer went on, "and one of you will show me round the buildings."

"I'll show you round the buildings," said the Abbot. "Where would you like to start?"

The officer waved a hand to indicate that he had no preference.

The Abbot led the officer, accompanied by two of his men, through the hallway into the refectory. This was empty, and obviously there was no hiding place, and after a cursory glance around the party went through into the kitchen where the Brother Kitchener was preparing the midday meal with the assistance of the brothers who had been detailed to help. Brother Kitchener was made to open all the cupboards and the storerooms as well as the dumb waiter which carried food from the kitchen up to the infirmary. The officer made certain that no one was hiding there.

Then the party went upstairs to the infirmary. This too was empty. There happened to be no sick monks. The linen cupboard was opened for inspection. Next the dormitory was carefully examined; every cell was inspected, all cupboards and wardrobes opened. The party was then taken through the scriptorium and study where a number of the monks were working; then the toilets, the bathrooms. After a tour round the Chapel, the group was led into the Abbot's house.

"Here is the Abbot's parlour."

"Thank you." The officer bowed, and was shown out of the building.

The night passed without incident, although the monks could hear the troops singing in their tents.

At Mass the following morning, the monks were surprised to find the officer standing to attention at the end of the Chapel. He made the sign of the Cross where it was customary to do so, but did not approach the altar at Communion. The Abbot was intrigued. Afterwards, the Abbot got the story out of him.

"Seminarians and theological students in my country are not exempt from military service. There are a number of us, and life is not easy."

"Don't some of the things you people do bother you?" the Abbot asked.

He officer looked at him, and shrugged. "I have my duty to do."

But he said it in Japanese.

Later in the morning, the company left as they had come, having found nothing suspicious in the monastery's grounds or in the countryside around.

Thereafter the visits of the Japanese were more frequent, and always in some strength, and for a good while, the situation was quiet. The villages were, at least, not harassed by the invaders even if their situation got progressively worse, and they came to rely more and more on the monks for relief. There were rumours, however, of disturbances farther afield, and of stern reprisals. Life in the monastery went on in as normal a fashion as possible.

"War has broken out. England and France are at war with Germany," the Abbot told the community one autumn day. "Belgium succumbed to the Germans. Japan and Germany are now allies."

The Abbot was told by a Japanese officer that he was now an enemy alien and was under house arrest: he must not leave the monastery without permission even if he needed to see a doctor. The same rule applied to all the monks who were French. Not long afterwards, when Petain surrendered to the Germans, he was told that he was now an honoured ally, and restrictions on him and the few French monks of the monastery had been lifted.

Meanwhile, Paul was drawing to the end of his theological studies. He was first rapidly ordained through the four minor orders and then admitted to the order of sub-deacon. He now assisted at the celebration of High Mass, not as a server at the bottom of the altar steps, but in the company of the celebrant and the deacon at the altar. One of his jobs was to chant the lesson. However, he had to wait until he was ordained deacon before he could chant the Gospel, or give a homily.

And so, clad in the purple vestments for the season, this was what he did at High Mass on the snowy First Sunday of Advent. That Sunday, one of his fellow monks accompanied Father Stephen to Lungchuan instead of him. Maria Chang would have preferred

to come down to the Abbey that day, but she had to be at home for Father Stephen.

"Sorry to miss your first Mass as deacon," she told Paul the next time they met, "but I couldn't leave Father Stephen."

So impressive was his chanting that the Abbot decided to train him as assistant precentor. He was glad that he still had the duty of looking after the monastic tractor.

Problems similar to those suffered by outside communities at large, though to a different degree, beset the monastery also. The apricot extracts which had provided to a large extent the monastery's income now found few buyers, and went into storage rather than generating funds. The grain crops the monks cultivated became the main source of food for people of the countryside around as well as for the monastery. The milk from the monastery's herds went to supplement the diets of the children.

"The situation cannot," Brother Cellarer told the Abbot, "last forever. There will come a time when there won't be enough to feed both us and the people outside."

Father Abbot did not hesitate.

"Do what you can, Brother. If we have to have short commons, we'll have short commons. We cannot allow our friends in the villages to starve."

Communist groups had been most active in fighting a guerrilla war against the Japanese. In fact, most of the trouble that the Japanese experienced had usually been caused by them. But when Hitler and Stalin signed their famous, or infamous, pact, the situation changed. The Communists made only a token show of resistance to the invaders. It they had not done so, they would have lost all credibility with the people they had been so keen to profess they were protecting from tyranny. Other groups, however, were active. Their activities consisted chiefly of disrupting communications and destroying military supplies. The guerrillas always managed to melt away at the approach of the Japanese and were never caught. The

occupying authorities showed their frustration with more and more stringent regulations. Identity papers were issued and movements were restricted, and making a living became difficult. Villagers had to provide proof of identity to come to Mass. Even monks travelling to say Mass in their habits were not exempt. Several times, Father Stephen and Paul were turned back on their way to Lungchuan 'because of an emergency'.

In the middle of all this, Paul passed his final theology examination, and he was advanced to the diaconate. He felt a real thrill when his turn came to chant the Gospel of the Sunday at High Mass: he was almost 'there'!

And then the day of his ordination to the priesthood approached. At one of his visits to the monastery, Dr Kung asked him:

"Is there anything you would especially like, Paul, to celebrate your ordination?"

It was customary for diocesan priests to receive a chalice as an ordination present from their family or friends. Not infrequently, some of them ran into serious debt to pay for the present: it was almost like paying for the wedding of a son of the family. But Dr Kung, surely, knew that a monk had no personal property. A gift to him would be a gift to the monastery.

Paul politely declined. A couple of days before the ordination, however, the Abbot sent for him.

"Dr Kung," he said, "has sent you a present. Why don't you open the box to see what it is?"

It was a chalice, delicately simple in design, gold-plated on silver, with 'To Father Paul on his ordination' etched round the base.

"It's beautiful," Paul whispered. "But he shouldn't have. I asked him not to."

"You can thank him in person tomorrow," said the Abbot. "He's coming up with Mrs Kung for the ordinations if he can and the Japanese are not closing the roads. They won't be going back till the day after the ordinations."

It happened that the Japanese had imposed no travel restrictions on the big day, and there was a sizeable congregation from the Catholic population around. There was even a Protestant missionary among them, who had come with his family. He was in fact a frequent visitor to the monastery. However, apart from Dr and Mrs Kung, and the Protestant missionary and his family, there were no visitors from Peking, or Tientsin, as there had been in previous years.

The monastery laid on what in those hard times could well be described as a sumptuous feast after the long ordination ceremony. The refectory was somewhat overcrowded with the community and the large number of guests present, but it was an enjoyable and cheerful occasion. When the guests had dispersed, the normal routine of monastic life was resumed.

And for Paul, another threshold of his life had been passed. He was now an ordained member of the clergy, with the privilege of celebrating Mass, and the power of loosing and binding. But above all, he was a monk, vowed to stability, obedience and conversion of manners before God and His Saints. In a very uncertain world.

Then one day, Brother Porter hurried up the driveway to the main building to report that something really serious had happened. Three miles or so out of Yang Chia Ping, a Japanese convoy had been ambushed, and a number of the troops killed by sniper fire, and the guerrillas had as usual disappeared before the Japanese could redeploy and go on the offensive.

"The villagers are frightened," he told Father Abbot. "Very frightened."

"Do you know if anyone from Yang Chia Ping was involved?"

"Not as far as I know. I don't think they're likely to have been involved."

"Ah." The Abbot shook his head. "There are other ways of being involved than toting a rifle."

His own seventeen-year-old niece, he knew, although the family had not said so openly in their letters, was being involved in the

maquis as a messenger. He prayed daily for her, but was quite proud of her, really.

The Japanese arrived the next day in strength at Yang Chia Ping. The vehicles stopped in the centre of the village square, and the soldiers spilled out to form a ring of steel around them. The sun glinted on the bayonets of their rifles held at the ready, and the interpreter relayed the order of the soft-spoken officer through a loudhailer. The villagers emerged from their houses and were lined up in front of them. At a sign from the officer, the men of the village were pulled out and stood to one side of the square. Some of the women started to wail.

"Silence!" they were ordered through the interpreter. The wailing ceased.

One of the soldiers pointed up the road leading to the monastery. There, where the road met the square, stood the Abbot and a number of his monks, watching.

The officer walked up to the Abbot and saluted.

"Do not interfere," he said quietly in English. "This is none of your business." He then strode back to the centre of the square.

The children were sent back to their families, along with a couple of the old people. The rest were ordered to kneel in a line, facing away from the centre of the square. Two of them whimpered in fear; some others defiantly straightened themselves to kneel upright. The officer walked across behind them, and then walked back.

Three shots; they sounded hollow in the open air. Three dead men fell forward on their faces. The officer returned his revolved to its holster. This time, he did not bother to stop the wailing of the women.

The soldiers got back onto their vehicles and the convoy headed out on its way to the next village. The monks knelt by the dead men and said a prayer over them before helping their families to carry them into their homes for the funeral rites.

Then things went quiet for a while. There were no attacks on the

enemies for several weeks. Life slowly returned to what could be called normal, except for those who had lost their men. The monks tried to help them as much as they were able. One of the murdered men was Mr Gao, the village schoolmaster, and one of the monks, Father Raphael, went into the village every morning to fill his place until a new teacher was appointed. Eventually they found an old scholar who had got tired of living under occupation in Peking. Since his requirements were modest, the village was able to pay his wages, in kind. A lot of village schoolmasters were paid this way.

Paul now joined the group of monks who were priests in taking turns to say Mass in the surrounding villages. He found that there was a tangible atmosphere of fear and unease everywhere since the killings at Yang Chia Ping. People dreaded another outburst of patriotism. And they dreaded even more the prospect of Japanese retribution. They were caught, they were trapped: not everyone wanted to be a hero. He also became responsible for various people who grew interested in becoming Catholics, which meant that he was also working more closely with Maria Chang. When, almost inevitably, she got to know him better, she became more and more of a mother to him, and this worried him. He took his worries to Father Abbot.

"The point is," said Father Abbot, "you are aware of the situation. Situations like this happen, so what you need to do now is to keep an eye on it, to make sure it doesn't cross a boundary." He looked up at Paul. "You understand what I mean?"

"Yes, Father."

When Hitler decided to revoke the Soviet pact and invaded Russia, the Chinese Communists again became active. One day, there was news of another guerrilla attack on the Japanese, who suffered a number of casualties. The retribution was again savage. This time, it fell on a neighbouring village, and one of the village elders was beheaded. Then there was news of an even more savage incident. Although Father Abbot had come to know about the massacre at

Nanking and he had in turn informed the community, not many people of the villages were aware of the atrocities committed there. So this new incident generated absolute horror.

There was in a small town called Lushan, about ten miles or so from Yang Chia Ping, a small hospital run by Dr Chandler, a British medical missionary. He was supported by his wife, who was also a doctor, as well as several local nurses and kitchen staff. Although to the Japanese he was an enemy alien, he was left alone, and continued to run his hospital. Dr Kung knew him, and had frequently supplied him with the drugs that he needed. Then one day a company of troops burst into the hospital, accusing Dr Chandler of sheltering guerrilla fighters. In spite of the doctor's protests, they went through the hospital, and when they could not find any, they accused Chandler of hiding them in secret places.

That night, Brother Porter opened the gate to a young villager in a blood-soaked jacket, and with traces of blood on his face.

"They started screaming," the young man told the Abbot, "at the doctor, and at everybody. I came out of the kitchen to look."

And the horror of what he had seen made him pause, before he was able to go on.

"And then, the officer drew his sword… and cut off the doctor's head. It… it dropped on a chair before falling on the floor… and the doctor was still standing… There was blood on the ceiling."

"And then?" the Abbot prompted.

"Two of them went for the doctor's wife with bayonets. She doubled up and fell… there."

The speaker pointed with his finger, as though he was describing what he was witnessing.

"Then they all went mad, and bayoneted everyone, including the patients. A couple tried to run, but they were shot down in the garden."

"I was lucky. My friend fell on top of me, and I played dead until I heard them drive away."

Instead of cowering with fear now, the people decided that they had had enough. At the approach of a Japanese patrol, able-bodied men of a village would melt away, so that only the elderly and the very young were to be found. Women were regarded as being below suspicion, for, being country people, they were thought to be unpolitical, and therefore harmless. The Japanese had not, it seemed, noticed that there were now, almost suddenly, a large of number of village women on bicycles in the countryside. Some of them even appeared to have become quite friendly.

One wintry day, when a half-frozen patrol tumbled off their open-topped carriers, a couple of women brought them steaming pots of tea. One of them even managed a few words of Japanese. One smiled shyly at the officer, who had the good manners to smile back.

I wonder what they are at, he thought to himself. But in the next few minutes, in a conversation held in broken Japanese and still less fluent Chinese, the woman learned that the soldiers were not due back for four days. Small matter. But the newly formed local guerrilla group was made aware of the information within half an hour.

Some of the monks became involved as messengers. Paul quite often carried messages from village to village, as he made his weekly rounds. He had no illusion about the risks he was taking, certainly for himself if he was caught, even though his monastic habit gave him some protection. He knew that some of the brothers were also involved, but as they never talked about it, he had no real idea who they were or what in fact they did. And Father Abbot? Surely he knew?

The Japanese tried to impose a news blackout in the territory they occupied, and no radios were permitted on pain of death. A number of people were executed for possession, but news did manage to be disseminated through the few radio sets that were successfully hidden. And through the post which, surprisingly, the occupying power never managed to control. But there was good news, and there was bad news. News of the unsuccessful Japanese assaults

on the southern key stronghold of Changsha boosted everybody's spirits. The lack of progress in South China was another encouraging situation; the Japanese had occupied Canton and the coastal strips of the south-eastern and southern provinces of the country, but made practically no advance inland. For a couple of years it was stalemate chiefly because the Japanese had their hands full elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific, where they were, it seemed, unstoppable. They were not shy about telling people about Pearl Harbor, for example. They could not stop telling everybody who would listen that they were going to bring down imperialist America. They took Hong Kong in eighteen days. And they had defeated British Empire forces in the jungles of Malaya and outwitted them over Singapore. Now they were on their way to India, and Australia wasn't safe from them. China could wait.

Paul often wondered about his family. He had letters from his mother, who told him that everyone was safe and that they did not have a problem living under occupation. Some of his brothers – half-brothers, strictly speaking – had joined the national population migration to south-western China. She did not know where they actually were, but they had been heading for Chungking or Kweilin, or even Kunming, on the way to Burma and India.

One June day in 1944, when China had been at war for seven years, and Europe for four, Father Abbot told Chapter:

"The Allied forces have successfully made a landing in Normandy."

But this news was counterbalanced by a Japanese push into unoccupied China. This in turn sparked off another huge population movement in southern China, always staying just ahead of the Japanese advance. There was a two-pronged military movement. One prong drove through Changsha, which had held them up before, into Kwangsi, to be joined by the other prong advancing up the West River and the south coast. The combined forces then pushed north into the mountainous province of Kweichow, aiming for the last

bastion of Chinese resistance, Szechuan. The wartime capital of China, Chungking, was probably not so secure after all.

And Paul. He had lost all contact with his family during this Japanese onslaught. All he could do was pray.

Again the invaders were held up. They were overstretched, and the mountains of Kweichow were defeating them. At the same time, their European allies, Italy and Germany, were in retreat. Italy changed sides and Germany was alone. Japan had always, practically, been on her own, in spite of the Axis connection. When Germany surrendered to the Allies in April 1945, she was truly alone.

Eight long years of suffering, hunger and privation for the people of China eventually came to an end with the surrender of Japan to the Allies, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were devastated by atomic bombs in August 1945. There were endless, unresolved, discussions and debates regarding the justification of the use of the atom bomb, the echoes of which some people claimed were felt across the Yellow Sea in North China.

The monks celebrated what they hoped was the coming of peace with a solemn Te Deum, intoned by Paul, who was now the fully fledged new precentor. He still had charge of the monastic tractor, though.

As the situation settled, and crops were grown again, a delegation of village elders from the surrounding countryside presented the monastery with a plaque to thank the monks for the service they had rendered to their people. They were thanked for feeding the hungry, comforting the sick and the dying, filling in where there were gaps for necessary tasks. Solemnly, the plaque was placed on the gatepost at the entrance to the monastery. The village elders were then treated to lunch at the Abbot's table in the refectory.

***

But now the refectory was no more, nor the kitchen beyond. Paul crossed what used to be the cloister garden, now waist-high with weeds, and arrived at the Chapel.