



By LAO SHE

In our series of short stories by authors of different nationalities we now present one written by a Chinese. "Fire Wagon" (火車, huo ch'e) is the customary Chinese term for a train.

The author, Shu Ch'ing-ch'un, who uses Lao She (老舍, "Old Hut") as his nom de plume, comes from a Manchu family of Peking and is at present professor of history of literature at the Shantung University in Tsinan. His novels and short stories have placed him in the first rank of contemporary writers. A characteristic of his art of narrative is the delightful trait of naive and imperturbable humor apparent in the following story. It was translated from the Chinese by Dr. Alfred Hoffmann of the "Deutschland Institut" in Peking.—K.M.

IT WAS New Year's Eve. According to the old calendar, of course, for the new one doesn't count yet.

The train had finally started. The coaches groaned, and the passengers sighed contentedly. Some seemed to be counting silently: seven, eight, nine, ten—at ten you'll be at the station, that means you'll be home by midnight. Well, that's really not too late, although the children will be asleep. They placed their New Year's presents in the luggage rack: tinned goods, dried and fresh fruit, toys for the children. Looking at these things they could almost hear the cries of "Papa, Papa!"

Others knew that they wouldn't be home until dawn. They looked around among their fellow travelers and didn't find anyone whose face seemed even slightly familiar. Well, it would be next year by the time they got home.

Others again . . . How the train was crawling! In spirit they had already arrived home a hundred times, while their bodies were still firmly planted in the train. They smoked, drank some hot water, yawned, and longed to be at home. Their eyes were glued to the window, staring out into the night. Everything was pitch-black, formless. If they turned round they only saw the bored faces of the others. If they stared

straight ahead, they only had to yawn again.

There weren't many passengers in the second class. In one corner sat stout Mr. Chang and opposite him skinny Mr. Ch'iao. Both of them had spread out their blankets on getting into the train, so as to reserve a whole bench for themselves. Then, once the train had started and scarcely anyone had got on, each of them suddenly felt the bleak loneliness of traveling on New Year's Eve, and both realized at the same time that their greediness in wanting to keep a whole bench each had, after all, been a little petty.

Both were holding free passes in their hands which they had borrowed from friends and which they hadn't been able to obtain even one day earlier. Both were thinking the same thing: if holders of free passes let one wait till the very last day of the year, then there is nothing to do but to wait; and those people are mean enough to keep their friends on tenterhooks so long that they are almost in despair! Both men let out the same sigh: friends nowadays . . . hm, friends! Not to be compared with friends in the old days.

Stout Mr. Chang took off his fox-lined jacket and wanted to sit for a while cross-legged, in a sort of Buddha-position.

But he was too fat, and he wobbled too much. Moreover, it was very hot in the train, and the sweat ran down his plump forehead. "Boy! a hot towel!" he called, and then, turning to the thin Mr. Ch'iao: "Why is it always so hot in trains? Do you think it would be cooler in a plane?"

Mr. Ch'iao had, it is true, taken off his overcoat but, in spite of his long gown lined with thick Ninghsia lambskin and the black silk sleeveless jacket he wore over it, he did not feel at all hot. With a thin smile he said: "There are free passes for planes, too, and not hard to get at all. But . . ."

"I am quite against recklessly risking my life," replied Mr. Chang and made another supreme but unsuccessful attempt to force his fat legs into the Buddha-position. "Boy! The towel!"

The carboy had his hands full of hot towels. He was over forty, with a neck so long and thin that you would have thought that he could take his head off and put it on again without the slightest difficulty. Actually he was very conscientious, but today had been too much for him. As soon as he entered the coach he had begun to tell Little Ts'ui: "Look, now I've been on duty on the 27th and 28th on two trains running, and I'd figured out that I'd be off duty for New Year's Eve. And then, when the time comes, Mr. Liu suddenly turns up and says, 'You have another turn to do on the 30th.' Hm! You see, there are more than sixty of us on this run, and whom do they pick? Me! I don't care whether I celebrate New Year's Eve or not. But to be on duty today—that's really the limit!"

Old Long-neck glanced in the direction of fat Mr. Chang, changed his hot towels from one hand to the other, and took out one to give to Little Ts'ui.

"Here, wipe your face with it! I told off Mr. Liu all right: 'I don't care,' I said, 'whether I celebrate New Year's Eve or not, but the 30th is my day off. Now I've been on the run the whole year, and then this happens to me! More than sixty of us, and you pick me . . .'"

Old Long-neck's annoyance bubbled out of him as if from a bottle being poured out upside down.



Fat Mr. Chang

The greenish face of Little Ts'ui showed some signs of animation; one could have almost thought he was smiling. He nodded slightly in agreement but at the same time shook his head a little. Although he wished to show his sympathy with the boy, he did not, on the other hand, want so easily to give up his customary ambiguous attitude. Starting with the conductor and down to the boy, they were all, including even the most lowly pointsman, friends of Little Ts'ui. Indeed, this haggard green face was as good as a second-class ticket, and even in the Ministry of Railways there was hardly anyone to doubt the value and validity of this unique ticket; just as everyone knew that Little Ts'ui always carried one to two hundred ounces of opium on him, which, after all, was only fair. He knew how to get on with everybody.

"Pah! Who isn't busy the whole year through till the very last day?" Little Ts'ui wanted to tell some of his own troubles, and in this way gave the boy an opportunity, according to the Aristotelian idea of tragedy, to give vent to his own anger. "Aren't I in the same position? Today, on the 30th, I have to make one more run. But let's not talk about it."

The boy actually forgot some of his own troubles and sympathized with his fellow sufferer by wagging his head at Little Ts'ui like a camel. Meanwhile the

towels had got cold. He went back to pour some more hot water on them. When he passed Little Ts'ui on his return he didn't say anything and only closed his eyes for an instant to indicate the last ripples of his anger. At that moment the train jerked; the boy lost his balance and was thrown against Mr. Kou. "Please have a towel! Still traveling on New Year's Eve?" he addressed Mr. Kou in order to begin his tale of woe all over again. Although he knew Mr. Kou, he was not on such familiar terms with him as with Little Ts'ui, so he could not start a conversation offhand.

Mr. Kou's appearance was refined and elegant. He had not taken off his black woollen overcoat with the otter collar, and he was still wearing his brand-new black silk Chinese hat. Everything seemed to fit him perfectly. He sat there very dignified, as if on the stage or on the platform at a great meeting. He accepted a towel and then stretched out his hand so as to push up his coat-sleeve a little. Instead of bending his arm, he moved it in a semicircle. When his hand had thus reached his face, he wiped it with great care and dignity. Emerging all shiny from the towel, his face showed even more the impressiveness of his square-shaped head and his long ears, all of which attributes promised good luck. He only gave the boy a brief nod, without bothering to explain the necessity for his traveling on New Year's Eve.

"You see, it's just our bad luck!" the boy continued, who did not want to let Mr. Kou get away quite unscathed. "New Year's Eve ought to be a holiday; but that's not possible. Duty is duty!" And with the words, "Another one, please?" he took the towel from Mr. Kou.

Mr. Kou shook his head and silently refused the second towel as if in wordless sympathy with the hard luck of the boy. After all, everybody on that run knew

that Mr. Kou, being a relative of the railway district-superintendent Sung, could naturally travel second class for nothing; in these circumstances he had a certain dignity to maintain which did not permit him to chat about everyday matters with the boy.

The boy felt that Mr. Kou's nod had brought the conversation to a dead end. But still, if the relative of the railway district-superintendent Sung had nodded, he must be satisfied with that. Once again the train rocked violently. Swaying a little, the boy went as far as the middle of the coach and unrolled the twisted-up towels into oblongs which he very carefully held at two corners with two fingertips. "A towel, please?"

The palm of Mr. Chang's plump hand happened to touch the hottest part when he grasped the towel. He clapped it onto his face and wiped it as energetically as if he were polishing a mirror. "You, sir?" The boy turned to Mr. Ch'iao. But this gentleman did not feel particularly inclined to wipe his face. He just used the towel to remove some of the black layer from under his nails.

"The ticket inspector is coming soon." As the boy did not like to speak up point-blank and tell his troubles to strange travelers, he first beat about the bush a little: "When the inspection is over, the gentlemen should lie down a little. If you should wish for a pillow, you need only say so. There aren't many people on the train, so you can easily sleep for a while. It's too bad you have to spend New Year's night on the train. We members of the staff . . . we have no choice!"

"Why is it always so hot in the train?" Mr. Chang groaned as he threw back his towel to the boy.

"Just the same, please don't open the window. As soon as it is open, you are sure to catch cold, and I can only tell you that no one will be responsible if



Skinny Mr. Ch'iao

anything happens to you on the train." But then the boy quickly brought the conversation back to his old refrain: "Now tell me! All year long one does one's duty on the train and just manages to hope for a free New Year's Eve! Oh well, never mind! Let's not talk about it!"

The main reason for the boy's saying "Let's not talk about it!" was that the train had arrived at a small station.

A few people got out from the third class, all of them with bundles on their backs and baskets on their arms. They hurried out of the station, but then hesitated again for a moment, as if they had left something behind in the train.

No one had got out of the second class, but seven or eight soldiers had got on, their leather boots resounding heavily and their leather belts shining with polish. They brought in four parcels of extra-large New Year crackers in crimson paper printed with gold characters. The crackers were too enormous to be put anywhere. Wild stamping around of leather boots, a pushing back and forth in all directions, coarse words—and the more suggestions were made the less anybody knew what to do. "Just put them on the floor!" ordered the sergeant. "Put them on the floor!" repeated the corporal. The whole troop bowed, stood at attention, clicked their heels, and saluted. The sergeant returned the salute: "All right, dismiss!" The corporal saluted again: "Dismiss!" Again the hard tramping of the leather boots, and all the gray caps, gray puttees, and leather belts disappeared together from the train. "Quickly, get off the train!" Then a shriek of the whistle, a puffing of the engine, signal lights, shadowy figures, the rolling of wheels, movement. The train had started off again.

The boy seemed to be worried about something. He went from one end of the train to the other, threw a glance at

the sergeant and the corporal, and then another glance at the crackers on the floor, but he did not dare to say anything and finally sat down to have another chat with Little Ts'ui. For his bad luck was still eating him, and so he began to tell all over again the whole story of his being on duty, only this time in more detail and with greater satisfaction.



The boy

However, the crackers on the floor left the boy no peace, and so he hesitatingly returned to them once more. The sergeant had already assumed a position of sleep. He looked very tired and had put his pistol on the little table. The corporal had not yet plucked up enough courage to relax entirely. He had only taken off his gray cap and was vigorously scratching his head. Of course the boy did not dare to disturb the sergeant. Instead, he only smiled at the corporal from a distance: "Those, er . . . crackers, couldn't we put them up on the luggage rack?" "Why should we?" retorted the corporal brusquely. He was enjoying his scratching so much that he sucked in his breath through his teeth with his mouth all askew.

"I am afraid someone might bump into them," said the boy, drawing in his long neck a little.

"Who would dare bump into them, and why?" shouted the corporal in annoyance, opening his eyes wide, without, however, gaining much respect through this.

"Never mind," replied the boy, anxious to appease, although, when he spoke these words, he had a feeling as if a heavy stone were pressing on his head. And with a smile so obliging that his face became quite flat, he repeated: "Never mind! But where are you going with these things?"

"Do you want me to beat you up?" roared the corporal, who thought it was better to get angry, although in his heart

of hearts he was totally indifferent to the matter.

The boy, who saw no necessity for a quarrel, returned quietly to Mr. Chang. "Tickets are going to be inspected now!" he announced.

Stout Mr. Chang and skinny Mr. Ch'iao had meanwhile got into a friendly conversation, for they had found a mutual acquaintance by the name of Tzu-ch'ing, and this Tzu-ch'ing was, as they discovered, a distant relative of Mr. Ch'iao's.

Ticket inspection: the first official was a man with a gold-braided cap and a soft, white, expressionless face which seemed to be looking for ever into the distance. The second man, also with gold braid on his cap, was a little dark dwarf whose whole face was a smile that compensated for the grimness of the first official. In the third class, the faces of both men became equally grim and expressionless; in the second class, one remained grim and one became friendly; in the first class both smiled. The third man was a big fellow from Tientsin, with a revolver and a belt full of cartridges. And the fourth was a tall chap from Shantung, with pistol, cartridges, and a big sword hung round his waist. The fifth was the boy who, as he could neither stretch out nor draw in his long, thin neck, was obliged to bend it over sideways to the right. They began their ticket inspection with Little Ts'ui.

The green face of Little Ts'ui with its black teeth was well known to all of them. When they saw it again now, with Little Ts'ui smiling at them, it looked tired to them. Gold-braid Cap Number 1 fixed his gaze on a point in

the distance, as if he were interested in something there, and tapped his leg with the little shining ticket-puncher in his hand. Gold-braid Cap Number 2 exchanged a nod with Little Ts'ui. The big fellow from Tientsin gave a short laugh, but immediately put on a grim face again, like an electric light flashing on and off.

The hand of the tall chap from Shantung fumbled around with his cap. He had a lot to say to Little Ts'ui, but, his eyes shyly averted, decided to wait a while. The boy himself felt embarrassed at the situation in which Little Ts'ui found himself, and he therefore felt called upon to apologize to him for the others: "Please, please! Do sit down again!

There aren't many passengers! Let's talk about it afterwards!"

The boy moved swiftly on. "Ah, Mr. Kou!"

Gold-braid Cap Number 1 thought that the boy always talked too much to the passengers. So he at once held out his hand to Mr. Kou and

asked: "How is the Railway District-Inspector Mr. Sung? Why are you still traveling so late in the year?"

Mr. Kou smiled, which rendered him even more dignified, withdrew his hand, raised both hands in greeting, and made some vague remark which anyone could take to be words of politeness. The two tall fellows had posted themselves at attention and did not dare take part in the conversation, as their rank hardly permitted them to do so. So they just stood there, very stiff and erect.

The boy took this opportunity to move on quietly and to announce the ticket inspection to Mr. Chang and Mr. Ch'iao. When he had taken their tickets and



noticed that they were free passes, he treated the two gentlemen with heightened respect. He handed over Mr. Chang's ticket right away, but hesitated slightly over Mr. Ch'iao's, as it had been issued expressly for a person of female sex. There could hardly be any doubt that Mr. Ch'iao was a person of male sex. The two gold-braid caps, however, passed on very quickly when they recognized the situation. They overlooked it silently: for all they cared a woman could turn into a man on New Year's Eve. The boy politely handed back the ticket with two hands, a gesture equivalent to an expression of regret over this little incident.

The sergeant was already snoring. The corporal, on seeing the ticket inspectors approaching, hurriedly pulled up his feet onto the seat to indicate that he, too, was asleep and did not wish to be disturbed. All eyes turned to the gigantic crackers on the floor. The clumsy chap from Shantung nodded his head in admiration of these really uncommonly large crackers. The tall fellow from Tientsin said to Gold-braid Cap Number 2: "Must be a present for Brigadier Ts'ao!" No one had any reply, and so the whole group moved on. When they had reached the end of the coach, Gold-braid Cap Number 1 instructed the boy: "Tell them to put the crackers up onto the luggage rack!" The boy nodded several times, his neck wobbling to and fro. He said nothing, but he thought: "As you don't dare to say anything to them, there is nothing left for me to do but nod. But between nodding and doing something there is a big difference."

When the boy went back to Little Ts'ui he realized from the dark patina on the latter's face that he needed a cup of hot water. He brought it without being asked. Little Ts'ui was too far gone to thank the boy. He pulled something out of his pocket and pressed it into the palm of his left hand. Lifting his hand to his mouth, he shook it a little, closed his eyes, and took a sip of water. His haggard cheeks moved slightly; he held his breath, and a gurgling sound could be

heard from his throat. Then he opened his eyes wide, and a smile spread over his green face.

"More important than eating," said the boy encouragingly.

"More important than eating," Little Ts'ui replied contentedly.

Mr. Kou simply could not keep his coat on any longer. He took it off, while his eyes wandered around uncertainly. On the one hand, he wanted to put his coat in a safe place; on the other, he wished to maintain a dignified and weighty attitude. The clothes-hooks were a little too low. If he hung his coat on one of them, the lower part of it must needs hang down upon the seat, so that one or two little creases might quite possibly form. If he laid it flat on a vacant seat, this would have the disadvantage that the coat would be a little too far away from him, so that his close relationship to the otter collar might no longer be immediately apparent. On the other hand, he could not very well carry it for long over his arm, just as one cannot let one's concubine sit on one's lap in public. He could not make up his mind. His eyes went up to his eighteen pieces of luggage on the luggage rack: four large bundles, five baskets, two small baskets with handles, two trunks, one suitcase, two bottles, one parcel wrapped in newspaper and one in brown paper. One, two, three, four . . . the space they took up was more than twenty feet long. He was quite satisfied that they were not packed too close together, one on top of the other. He still held his coat over his arm, almost as if he did not know any solution. All the more reason to sit there very straight and dignified.

"Soon it's New Year, and not yet home! Soon it's New Year, and not yet home!" the rhythm of the racing wheels seemed to be repeating. And yet the train was going much too slowly! Stars went up and down in the sky, hills, trees, villages, and graves flew past as black, shadowy masses. The train rushed from one darkness into another. Smoke and

sparks crowded together above it, and fell behind. Steam and dripping water streamed out underneath it.

The train sped on and on, without losing its breath. A black spot, several shades of black—gone! A black surface, an empty black—gone! A strip of snow, a low range of hills, changing light and dark—gone! But still too slow, too slow! "Soon it's New Year, and not yet home!"

In the train: bright lights, hot air, impatient people. Nothing to make one want to sleep. "Soon it's New Year, and not yet home!" Farewell to the old year, sacrifices to the spirits, worship of the ancestors, pasting lucky mottoes on the doors, bursting crackers, meat dumplings, gaily colored candied fruit, good wine and choice food: that was what they were thinking, tasting, hearing, smelling. A half-formed smile turned to sadness. One remembered that one was in the train. "Soon it's New Year, and not yet home!"

Outside: black shadows and more black shadows, stars dancing up and down in the sky, snow, now high, now low, no human sound, no vehicle, nothing. All an endless black shadow, embracing a train with bright lights and hot air as if it never wanted to let it go. "Soon it's New Year, and not yet home!"

Mr. Chang took down two bottles of *kaoliang* brandy from the luggage rack and, while he was rinsing the teacups, he said: "We have been friends from the start! Let's have a drink. At home they are celebrating New Year's Eve, so we'll also have to celebrate it in the train. Here, try this! A genuine twenty-year-old, in the original bottle. A high official from Manchukuo gave it to me. Come on, it's a fine drink!"

Mr. Ch'iao did not like to refuse, nor did he like to accept without further ceremony. He looked at the cup, but did not know what to do with his hands and sought for a way out. He took a

large paper parcel down from the luggage rack and opened it carefully. Inside were a number of smaller parcels, which he fingered one by one, like a drug-store apprentice his medicine packets when he has made them all up and compares them once more with the prescription. Finally he extracted three of the packets: dried lichees, dried dates, and spiced, smoked bean curd. Only when he had opened them all and laid them beside the wine cups did he smile and say: "Friends at first sight! So no more ceremony!"

Mr. Chang split open a lichee with his plump hands. It cracked merrily, just as it should at New Year's. Then he watched Mr. Ch'iao taking a sip of brandy, and not until Mr. Ch'iao had swallowed it did he ask: "Well, what do you say?"

"Excellent!" said Mr. Ch'iao, rolling up the tip of his tongue a little as if he did not want too much of the aroma of the brandy to escape from his mouth. "Really excellent! Not to be bought for money!"

They toasted one another, each giving the other precedence. Their faces gradually became flushed, and their tongues were loosened. The conversation touched on family, business, friends, the difficulty of making money, free passes . . . Cups were raised, hearts were lightened, eyes became a little moist. Enthusiasm and ardor waxed, and one could not but be magnanimous: Mr. Ch'iao opened another packet of candied oranges. Mr. Chang had really wanted to bring out some packets too, but, when he noticed that the second bottle of brandy had been opened, he preferred to let his friend know indirectly that he was not in the least stingy. He encouraged him by saying: "It must all be drunk up! One bottle each! Not a drop must be left over! This year must end well! After all, this brandy does not make you drunk; now that we have found each other, it doesn't matter if we drink some more. So drink up!"



Little Ts'ui

"Oh, but I can't drink so much . . ."

"Nonsense! Twenty years old and in the original bottle can't disagree with you! It must be Fate to make a new friend on New Year's Eve."

Mr. Ch'iao was deeply moved. "All right—I'm with you!"

As Little Ts'ui seemed to have no further wishes, the boy decided during the conversation that now was the time to get something to eat and drink from the dining-car and to let Little Ts'ui take a nap. "What do you think? Should I go to the dining-car?" The boy got up and looked around the coach.

Little Ts'ui had no objection. The boy saw that Mr. Kou had lain down. His feet stuck out over the arm of the seat. One could still see the crease down the middle of his new, semi-wool socks. Mr. Chang and Mr. Ch'iao, the two gentlemen with the free passes, were drinking themselves into a merry mood. The sergeant and the corporal were already fast asleep, while the crackers in their crimson paper still lay harmlessly, but nevertheless somehow loaded, on the floor. Very quietly the boy slipped into the dining-car.

Rolled into a ball, Little Ts'ui squatted on the seat, his eyes closed.

There was not much left in Mr. Chang's bottle. He unbuttoned his jacket, for the sweat was running down his temples and over his cheeks. His eyes had become inflamed and his tongue heavy. He talked unceasingly, but, as his tongue no longer obeyed him properly, many of his sentences came out clumsily. However, his mind was still clear, for when Mr. Chang began with Mr. Ch'iao to abuse things in general, his tongue became quite loose again; and when his confused language turned into intelligible words, it could be seen that his drunkenness had by no means made him impolite.

Although Mr. Ch'iao had only drunk half a bottle, his face had already taken on a greenish white, frighteningly white

hue. He brought out cigars and threw one across to Mr. Chang. Each lit one. The cigar in his mouth, Mr. Chang lay sprawled across his seat, quite unembarrassed by the fact that his legs were dangling over the arm of the seat. He wanted to sing the well-known aria about the "Lonely Drunken King," but his throat was so dry and hoarse that he could not produce a single note. All he could do was blow air through his nose like a raging bull. In the meantime Mr. Ch'iao had collapsed in his seat. His cigar stuck between his fingers, he was staring at the boots of the corporal sitting across the aisle from him. His heart was pounding, he belched, and his face was pale and tingled.

"Soon it's New Year, and not yet home!" The rhythm of the wheels sounded particularly fast in Mr. Chang's ears. The wheels pounded fast, his heart pounded fast, and suddenly—whang! He felt as if his skull were circling around in the air, like a fly buzzing around. Everything seemed bright red to him, turning into a lot of red circles. Suddenly the buzzing stopped, his spirit returned to his body. Carefully he opened his eyes, and when he felt a little stronger again he behaved as if nothing had happened, took a match with his plump hand and lit his cigar, which had gone out.

With a sluggish movement he threw away the match. There! A bright flame! Everything that had come into contact with the brandy—cups, bottles, table, seats—was enveloped in a blue, alcoholic flame, indistinct, flickering, gradually growing and extending in every direction.

Mr. Ch'iao started up in alarm. The cigar in his hand had already become a flame. He flung it from him. He beat rapidly with both his hands on the table. The bottles fell over, the cups crashed, the paper parcels spat flames in all colors. Mr. Chang's face was already entirely covered in flames, the tongues of fire turned and twisted as if someone were juggling with fiery balls. Mr. Ch'iao wanted to run away. Sparks had already reached the luggage rack and had turned the parcels lying there into one great

mass of flames. Mr. Ch'iao had become a torch: the fire crept up to his eyebrows. His eyebrows sizzled and burnt. The fire seized his hair. His hair sizzled away. The fire jumped to his lips. On his lips the last of the brandy flamed up like fire from the mouth of the fire god.

Suddenly there was a deafening noise. Bang! Bang! Bang! Several crackers exploded one after another. Just as the corporal opened his eyes, a double cracker hit him in the face. Blood and sparks sprayed up together. He jumped up and ran like a madman; under his feet, around his body, wherever he stepped, there were frightful explosions. The sergeant was not even able to get up. The flames had seized his whole body.

Mr. Kou woke up with a start. His first glance went to his luggage on the rack. Some of the parcels were already enveloped in flames. The fire crept down from above, approaching closer and closer, like an angry dragon whose tongues of fire licked all around Mr. Kou's body. As he jumped up the thought shot through his brain: break the windows and jump out! He seized his shoe and smashed the panes. The glass splintered, wind poured in, the fire roared up like mad. Everything—the otter collar, the four big bundles, the five baskets, his whole body—was a sheet of flame. The train rushed on. The wind howled. The crackers exploded. Mr. Kou fled in terror.

Little Ts'ui, used to traveling by train, had not opened his eyes when he heard the first sounds. But then the fire started to creep up him, too, from his feet. The heat turned the opium on his body into a red-hot paste. He jumped up frantically. All he saw was smoke, crackers, fire, flames. The opium paste on his body poured forth a curious fragrance and developed a tremendous heat. He could no

longer move his legs. Gradually the fire crept higher up on him till he turned into one great bubble of opium in the shape of a huge silk cocoon.

Little Ts'ui was past moving. Mr. Chang was so drunk that he no longer knew how to move. Mr. Ch'iao ran around like a madman, Mr. Kou ran around like a madman, the corporal ran around like a madman, and the sergeant knelt on his seat and groaned frightfully.

The flames had already seized the entire coach. There was a sticky smell of sulphur. Everything made of paper and material was completely burnt up, and the crackers were silent. There was only thick smoke, roasting fire, suffocating heat. The men running around fell to the ground, the kneeling man stopped groaning. The clouds of smoke grew thicker as the fire got hold of the wood-work in the coach.

The train raced along. The wind howled. Red flames forked up in the smoke. Everywhere people were trying to get out. The flames roared up, the smoke turned white, fiery tongues shot out of the windows. The whole train became transparent with light, and flames flickered up everywhere, as if hundreds of torches were being tossed about.

The train came to a small station where it did not stop. The man who exchanged the control pouch at the station thought: "Fire!" The man with the signal lamp cleared the track and thought: "Fire!" The pointsman threw the switch, the railway guard stood at attention, and all thought: "Fire!" The half-drunk station master did not appear on the platform until the train had already passed,

and when he indistinctly saw something glowing like fire he thought it must have been his eyes. The control-pouch man handed over his control pouch, the signalman



extinguished his lamp, the pointsman switched back his switch, and the railway guard shouldered his gun and went back into his guardroom. All of them retained a memory of a fiery glow, but no one said a word about it. A little while later the last trace of the fire had disappeared from their hearts. All their thoughts were turned toward celebrating New Year's Eve: they set off crackers, drank wine, played mah-jong. There was an atmosphere of profound peace.

Having passed through the station the train increased its speed again. Wind and flames roared together. Sparks flew out in all directions. Pitch-black was the night through which the train moved like a single elongated light spitting flames on all sides. Nothing but a skeleton remained of the second class, from where the flames licked greedily towards the third-class coaches in front and behind. "Fire! Fire! Fire!" shrilly sounded the voices of mad, tortured people. There were many people, confused thoughts: some smashed the windows, but hesitated to jump; others dashed around wildly, bumping and falling; others again sat there, apathetic, wanting to scream but not finding their voice; others were collecting their parcels and packages. Panic. The fire had reached them, was crawling up their bodies. Howling, whimpering, desperate struggling, beating of clothes, mad scrambling, away, out of the train. . . .

The fire had found a new field, with lots of people, lots of things. In wild delight it stuck out its tongues, licking through the enveloping smoke, breaking through it like a fiery column, attacking human bodies and devouring them. The noises grew more manifold, things came tumbling down, people screamed and groaned. In the howling wind all was consumed by the flames.

The train got to the next station, which was a stop. The control-pouch man, the signalman, the ticket collector, the guard, the porter, the station master, the acting station master, the chief accountant, the clerk, and the relatives of the station officials employed in some

capacity or other, all stood and stared in stupefaction, for there was no fire-fighting equipment at the station. No human sound came from the second-class coach and the two third-class coaches right and left of it, and nothing moved; there was only a little smoldering smoke and a few quietly flickering flames, as if it were meant to be that way.

It was said that fifty-two bodies were found after the catastrophe; eleven bodies were found along the track—people who had been killed while jumping out of the train.

Two weeks later, on the first day after the New Year holidays, officials arrived to investigate. They received invitations from all sides and were wined and dined. Three days of this did not leave them any time to worry about the investigation. Besides, the chairman of the investigation commission had some private affairs to look after, which, reasonably enough, came first, so that the investigation was delayed another three days. Not until all invitations had been followed up and the private affairs settled, did the investigation commence.

The conductor knew nothing, the first official with the gold-braided cap knew nothing, the second official with the gold-braided cap knew nothing, the big fellow from Tientsin knew nothing, the tall chap from Shantung knew nothing, the boy knew nothing. The cause of the fire could not be discovered. The reports from the various stations on the number of tickets sold and handed back conformed in that exactly sixty-three tickets were missing, which had obviously been burnt in the train and which corresponded to the number of bodies found. No station had sold any second-class tickets, so the second class must have been empty. Hence it was impossible for the fire to have started there.

The questioning of the boy showed that he, too, knew nothing. But when the fire broke out he had been in the dining-car, and how could he, being in charge of the second-class coach, leave his post without permission and go into the dining-

car? Although this still did not throw any light on the cause of the fire, leaving one's post without permission was an act to be punished with instant dismissal.

The chairman of the investigation commission returned to his office and completed his job. The report was very conscientious, and the style in which it was written was extremely elegant.

"I should have been off duty on New Year's Eve. In spite of that they made

me do another turn. But, damn it all, what do I care!" the boy said to his wife and wobbled his long, thin neck. "Discharged—hm! Well, so what? If they don't want to keep me, I'll find another job all right! You needn't worry. As if one couldn't make a living without the railway!"

"Oh, I'm not worrying at all," the woman consoled her husband, "I'm only sorry about the nice leeks you wanted to bring me, which got burnt up with the train."



"GROSSRAUM" SONGS

In this magazine we have dealt with many aspects of the large political units which are developing at present in East Asia and Europe. We have discussed "Grossraum" economy and ideology, even "Grossraum" language and script. A further manifestation of that trend is that even "Grossraum" songs are beginning to appear—not one, but many, both in Europe and East Asia. We have translated two examples, and we publish them, not because of their literary value, but because they are an interesting expression of our time.—K.M.

SONG OF GREATER EAST ASIA

Our strength is like Mount Everest
And Kun Lun.
Our co-operation shines forth
Like the sun in the blue sky.

Onward let us march without hesitation,
Firm let us be in our determination.
With our comrades we will share
Sweet joy and bitter pain.

Let us defend East Asia
And liberate the South Seas!
When our new order is attained
The new world order will follow.
Our path is bright, and glorious our future.

SONG OF GREATER EUROPE

Let us face the morning
Of a glorious young time!
Let us fight the battle
For Europe's unity!

Away with all dissension,
Be worthy of the hour!
Together we must stand now
To safeguard Europe's homes!

That which was born in struggle
Must perish nevermore!
We have sworn to those who have fallen—
All Europe will be new!