

beard and face were a contrast of deep black and ghostly white. As he walked his steps were unsure, his shoulder blades stuck out precariously, and the back of his skull jutted out.

Each day, along with the others, he had been there filling in the foundation of the planned new prison building—they were in the process of piling rocks up on the foundation. The men were busy as usual and the foundation was already secure and level and sturdy.

I began increasing my pacing from one corner of the room to the other—that pale gray path grew even deeper, while the soles of my shoes had already worn through; as for the heels, the outsides were worn all the way down to the shoe lining. I was convinced that on my feet, before long, even the lining would soon be wasted away—just swallowed up.

As the goat neared his end there was no more of his own dung. For two whole days he simply lay there stretched out, and then he finally died. Before he died there were some people who threw bits of food to him, but what good were they then? By that time he had no more need for food.

Like the female before him, the goat's eyes took on a peaceful look . . . and he was finished.

The ocean is the same as always, the sky is the

same as always, and my vantage point of both the sky and the ocean is the same as always—everything is painted with early winter colors.

I no longer take pleasure in having my noonday strolls. I've grown to detest all those things in sight out there—the animal enclosure, the cell windows, and the new prison building under construction . . . even the window through which I could see the scenery on the hill at the rear, I've sealed it up; all that remains is the slice of ocean in front of me.

Once I received a letter from the two Russian kids. They said they had already reached Harbin, had received permission from their country, and were about to strike out across Siberia and return to their homeland. In the letter they wrote:

“Mr. ____, haven't you had your fill of the ocean yet? Wishing you good health. . . .”

Yes, my dear little friends, I'm still watching the ocean, watching the same slice of ocean . . . I'm healthy. . . .

I shook my head, and some strands of hair fluttered down onto the letter; this time I was truly smiling.

A rainy day
July 11th, 1935

(For Chinese text of Section I see page 154)

An Author's Mentors

My interest in literature began in childhood, and about ten years ago [in the early 1920's] I began to write. I was then in the army. At first I diligently studied Chinese classical poetry, and later I read the works of Lu Hsun and Kuo Mo-jo—the former's stories, the latter's poetry. Among the earliest works of new literature I read was Lu Hsun's *Wild Grass*, which I have always loved most. Among foreign authors I have liked Goethe and Chekhov best. As I read more I discovered the Soviet writers, among whose works I especially liked Gorki's *Mother* and A. Serafimovitch's *Sheleznyi Potok*, both of which greatly moved me, especially the latter, which had a profound influence on me. I have read little of the works of contemporary Chinese writers other than Lu Hsun and Kuo Mo-jo, hence I have not felt their influence.

—HSIAO CHUN (then known as T'ien Chun).

From an autobiographical sketch sent to Edgar Snow, quoted in the Introduction to an English translation of *Village in August*, published in New York, 1942.