

# Laughter MUST BE SHARED

BY WILLIAM CHADWICK

COLLIER'S  
SHORT SHORT

"May you have happiness," Mr. Li said. "I have saved a special incense cone for this important occasion"

**T**HE evening that my beautiful, slender, black-haired mother went with me to Mr. Li Fu's shop the clouds were hanging black and swollen over the city, threatening snow. I had been to the shop often before. But only to look. This evening I had come to buy.

My mother halted at the door of Mr. Li's shop. I went forward into the yellow lamplight, then paused and looked back at her, expectantly.

"I'll wait here, Bud," she said.

But I could not go the rest of the way inside. Remorse prevented me, even though I still kept my two dollars clenched in my fist. For in the last year I had become money-wise. The nickels and dimes which my father used to give me casually to spend just as casually belonged now to the past. There had been no talk between my mother and me about money since he had died, but I had become conscious of the lack of security.

For months Mother and I had discussed my birthday. She had promised me two dollars. And now two dollars I had. At first in my imagination I had spent it easily on a thousand things. But then a selective instinct had developed in me which changed to a heavy doubt. And it was doubt that had first led me into the side street and at last to Mr. Li's shop.

I had realized at once that Mr. Li was no ordinary shopkeeper. For as I had peered in his door he had said, "You must come in, for it is only from the center that one sees the whole."

"I'm only looking," I had said. "I'm not buying yet."

"That is wise," Mr. Li had said. "Be-

fore one buys, one should search diligently." Then he showed me the wonders of his shop, the rose jade and crystal, the fans and carved chests and heavy silks.

I told of my approaching birthday and promised, "I shall spend all my birthday money here."

"In which case," he had replied gravely, "you must come here frequently to see all that I have and take note of anything new that has come from China."

But now as I stood at the threshold of Mr. Li's shop the lump of coins in my hand seemed enormous. It was one thing to spend it only in imagination, and another to part with it recklessly. My mother had saved this vast sum. Now was the time to return it to her, for I knew she needed it. Then I recalled my promise to Mr. Li. And my face must have shown my anxiety for my mother bent over me and whispered:

"Hurry, honey. I'm so excited I just can't wait to see your present."

**I** TOOK a deep breath and with beating heart marched to the far end of the shop where Mr. Li in his yellow robe sat patiently watching me. Carefully I placed my two dollars on the counter and said, "I have come to buy my birthday present."

"May you have happiness," he said. "I have saved a special incense cone for this occasion. It is only once in a lifetime that a man may celebrate his eighth birthday and himself select the present which he desires. Would you, little Bud, like to see one more thing from China before you decide?"

My heart had been set on one of those

wonderful boxes. You opened it and found another box inside; and inside that, another little box; and another and another until at last you came to the final box and inside that you would find, carved out of ivory, a miniature figure of a man in a peasant's straw hat, quite perfect and beautiful. I hesitated. Then with my eyes on the money I nodded.

"Do you like to laugh?" Mr. Li said, and with the gesture of an Oriental magician reached under the counter and put before me the queerest little ivory man I have ever seen. He was fat. His head was bent to one side. His mouth was wide open and his two teeth were showing as his hands clasped his belly in a paroxysm of mirth. He looked as if he were sore from so much laughing. And I began to laugh, too, until tears squeezed from my eyes. "Laughter is like good wine," Mr. Li said. "It must be shared."

"I want to buy him," I said. "How much is he?"

"Let me see," Mr. Li said. His head sank in thought. "Two dollars. The price includes his box."

"Just what I have! I'll take him."

"Just a moment," my mother said from behind me. "You are good and thoughtful, Mr. Li, but this is a collector's piece. You must have had high offers for it. Bud only has two dollars. You must sell him something worth two dollars. Nothing more."

Mr. Li folded his hands into the sleeves of his robe. "It is true that I have had many offers for this ivory figure. But not one was as high as the offer I have had from little Bud this evening. He has offered all he has and that is a great price."

From beneath his counter he produced

a sandalwood box and in it he placed the little man and round it he wrapped a piece of white paper stenciled with green dragons. With one of his rare smiles he handed the box to me and said, "Su Tungp'o, a great Chinese poet wrote: A single hour in an evening of spring is worth a fortune of gold. Let him keep it. Laughter is the balm which eases the pain of life."

I looked doubtfully at my mother.

"It's yours, Bud," she said. "Thank Mr. Li for his goodness."

**A**T THE door of Mr. Li's shop I put the parcel under my coat. We passed out into the darkness and as I caught my mother's hand the first snowflake fell on my shoulder. I looked up at my mother's face and it was set and strained as we hurried through the snow. I bent my head down and pressed my nose against the parcel. Through the paper I caught the faint scent of warm sandalwood and I thought of the little man inside and I felt the laughter bubbling in me like a spring of water.

I stumbled. My mother jerked my arm.

"Bud! What on earth are you doing?"

"I'm laughing!" I spluttered. "I'm laughing with my little man!"

At the thought of him my mirth burst and I laughed until I shouted. In the darkness I glanced at my mother and saw the gleam of her teeth and heard the sudden rush of her own laughter. Then we were walking home through the New York snow, laughing and laughing. And next to my heart the little man in his sandalwood box was doubled up with mirth. ★★

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANCIS CHASE





**BY W. B. COURTNEY**

Shoved about like pawns in a game of high international politics are a million and a half desperate people, Europe's DPs. Their only crime was that they were brave enough to hold out for liberty; their only desire is to become useful citizens

*The first boatload of Displaced Persons and Refugees landed in America on the 21st of December, 1620; some 100 women and children and men of humble means and simple crafts. They were not the first permanent colonists here. But they are the most venerated in our history because they were the first arrivals who had been displaced by political oppression and made fugitives by religious persecution—and in that sense remain a foundation symbol of the United States of America.*

**O**NE day, 327 years after the Mayflower, I talked with a man in a camp near Munich, Germany, sardine-packed with 6,000 modern Displaced Persons and Refugees. The man had been a professor in a Baltic university until the Reds gobbled it.

He quoted an item he had read in an American newspaper describing objections by a patriotic ancestral society in the United States to the admission there of Displaced Persons. Then he added, gently: "Perhaps if we all were Anglo-Saxons and Episcopalians we'd be welcomed in the United States readily enough!"

Though it stung, I liked him for saying it. And I liked him for how he said it: without either timidity or ill feeling, but as one quietly trying to figure out what a thing really meant.

For what it really meant to me, I recalled a day, when Yanks were dying so that people like the professor could have freedom and homes again and our own could be secure. In what had been a Normandy meadow I watched identification squads do their bookkeeping in the human debris of battle. Perhaps some of these poor fragments were in direct line from the Pilgrims; but more, far more, stemmed from ancestors who had flocked much later through America's Open Gate.

Amid the stench of quick decay in that summer heat, and the commotion of near-by fighting, I thought there could be nothing worse about war. Here was its Last Mile, the end of a boy's progress from school and family to a quaking slot of earth. I thought, also, that in a fresh military cemetery like this, and not in palaces, the makers of peace should be compelled to hold their wranglings.

But that was maudlin nonsense of course. There are longer and worse Last Miles of war for the blinded, the maimed, the bereaved. And there is another, seldom remembered; but measureless and tragic because it is trod by *whole* and *living* people.

One and a half million such people are drifting along that sort of Last Mile now—Displaced Persons and Refugees for whom there is no Plymouth

Rock anywhere. Human beings who are nothing more than "Official Statistics." One million and a half men, women and children dutifully checked, identified, sifted for spies, catalogued, stamped and filed away by the International Refugee Organization. Impersonal columns of figures, expressionless thumbtacks, faceless circles on the charts of a vague and distant "problem."

Absolute precision in human records, as in those of any perishable and expendable goods, is not possible—varying from hour to hour with deaths, births, desertions. Actually, the number is somewhat larger: about 1,100,000 in Europe and nearly 600,000 elsewhere. But 1,500,000 is a nice round, impressive statistic—easy to remember: It's equal to the population of Detroit, for example.

"Statistics" begin to break down when you leave IRO headquarters and visit the camps. Visit many in a rush, and they, at least, break down into persons. Visit a few, more leisurely, and persons break down into people like those you see in the pictures on these pages. Visit just one camp; see its folks crowded like goldfish in a pet-shop globe; inspect their handicrafts; watch their native dances; listen to their haunting old-country songs—or the thin and wistful laughter that sweeps a room when they hear an American Forces Network broadcast that deals with the pleasures of life in the United States or extols the virtues of the American system. Then statistics at last break down into individual human beings. Like the professor you have already met.

But they break down into something else, too: 1,500,000 broken promises.

#### Camps Are Hotbeds of Future Wars

Here is a place for the holding of a peace conference! Any one of these camps in which the living human debris of war is dumped. In such camps lie more seeds of future wars than in fields where the killed in action are finished with pain and suffering. Because it is not what is done in war, but what is left *undone* after war, that corrodes the years of peace.

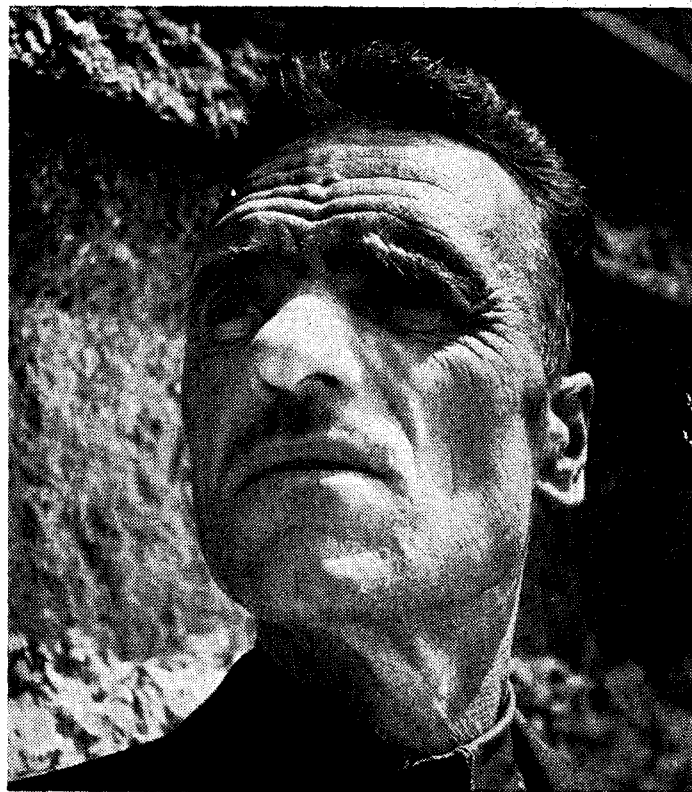
Nowadays the wealth, power and voice of the United States are fully extended to convince what's left of Europe that democracy's way of life is better. Yet in these camps you find refugees from the Communist way of life who are:

1. Bereft of human dignity by the sordid nickname which callousness and nonchalance have added to commonplace daily usage in our language—"DPs."

2. Pawed, selected, bargained for, swapped

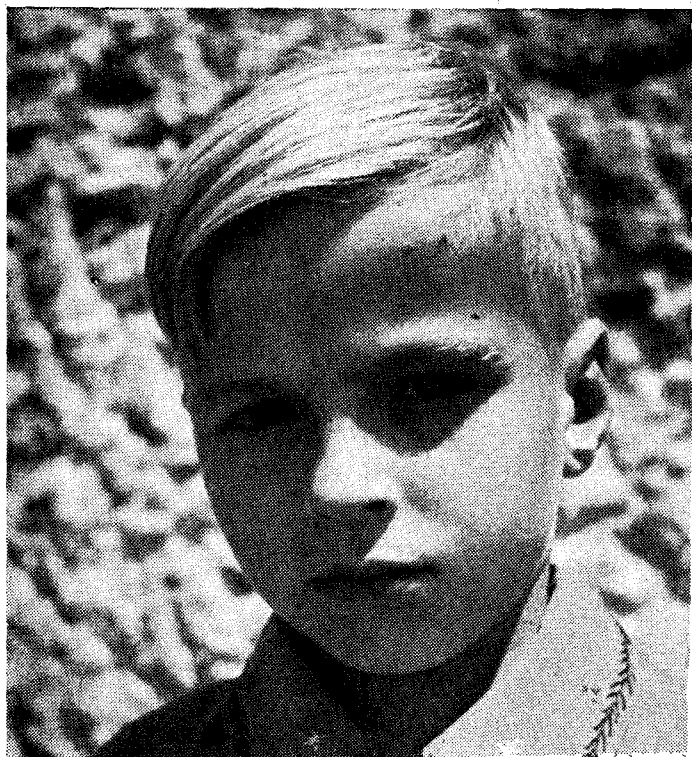


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