

# AN ARTIST IN KOREA

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**M**Y first impressions of Korea were of neat and well-cultivated fields under which the scars of war were only faintly discernible from the air. But as the plane approached the airport the crazy pattern of bomb craters became a terrible rash culminating in shattered hangars whose rusted, splintered girders glinted against the morning sun. In every direction lay the ruins of a city; it was as though one had landed on the moon. As the jeep raced along the pitted highway the enormity of Pyongyang's destruction began to be realised. Then one noticed that the desert had, in fact, been built on. Bridges had been constructed; temporary housing, schools, department stores and administrative buildings had been built—by the half million citizens who had returned.

I stayed in the only hotel, a converted department store; a large new one was being built nearby. Below my window a slogan read: 'Everything for the Reconstruction of our country.' Korean housewives, immaculate in their spotless white costumes against the dust and clamour, hurried along with shopping bags with their babies swaddled round their backs. Later, I visited the western half of the city—formerly the Korean quarter in the days of Japanese rule—from the rebuilt Moranbong Theatre which is situated on a height dominating the city, I looked across on to thousands of temporary homes; built on a wilderness where once had stood streets and houses. Here thousands had died as day and night raids brought avalanches of H.E. and incendiary bombs. Fire swept through the congested streets leaving behind a burnt-out desolate plain.

It is said that even Poles and Russians who went through the ordeal of Warsaw and Stalingrad, wept when they looked on Pyongyang after the Armistice talks brought peace. The city was consistently bombed for no other reason than that of being the biggest civilian target; for long after such military objectives as the river bridges, had ceased to exist, round-the-clock raids blasted down every kind of human habitation whether hospital, museum or school. Thousands lived like rabbits in tunnels and shelters. Over 50,000 were killed; the entire city was destroyed.

But in the months after the Armistice talks ended, the martyred city took on a new atmosphere; firm leadership gave the people the

heart to carry on. Temporary dwellings were erected. Willing hands cleared the streets of debris. The foundations of many new buildings were laid. As the work progressed, the people returned and the population rose from 180,000 to over 500,000. Soldiers built schools. A whole educational district is under construction in the eastern quarter of the city with an engineering polytechnic and other centres of higher education. A stadium was built—largely by the voluntary labour of student brigades. An emergency Three-year Plan aims at restoring essential buildings and services; this will be followed by a Five-Year Plan. In 20 years Pyongyang will be rebuilt; the city having been completely replanned with wide boulevards and parks.

From early morning there is a ceaseless flow of traffic; across the rebuilt Daidong Bridge, porters with 'everest' carriers carrying everything from drums of oil to great loads of vegetables and timber. New buses, the gifts of Russian, Czech and German workers, trundle by, crowded with girls on their way to the rebuilt textile mills on the far side of the Daidong River. Trucks race by with building equipment and supplies, for the day begins at six on the numerous building sites. Each day there were new faces in the hotel—Russians, Czechs, Germans, Poles and Hungarians—engineers and specialists, arrive to take part in the reconstruction of the country's life. After a day or two, they move on into the interior where they advise on the erection of a new factory, the building of a bridge or a railway. Much assistance has been and is being provided by the U.S.S.R. and other People's Democracies.

On the way to a village outside Pyongyang, I passed the famous Kim-Il-Sung University, built from the donations of rice—'the patriotic rice'—of tens of thousands of North Korean peasants. Gutted by the Americans, it has been rebuilt and is the landmark for many miles around; its silhouette majestic against the softly purple mountains of the south-west. The countryside around Miam—the village I visited—was golden with the ripened fields of millet and rice. There was singing in the fields, a co-operative had been recently established; its members were harvesting their first crops of peace.

Back in Pyongyang I was introduced to a group of Korean artists; they had asked me to tell them about art in Britain. They then told me about art in Korea. Of how, after liberation from Japanese occupation, plans were made to develop an art for the people. The war ended work on many ambitious projects and introduced a grim reality for artists. Some went to the front; others recorded the

struggle. Artists who had been trained in Europe and who had sought to introduce abstract art became the most powerful of realists. Artists lived in dug-outs and huts; made their own brushes and inks. In summer they worked in the shade of a tree, in winter on the snow. Air-raids made work difficult, at times impossible, but art-exhibitions nevertheless took place, even in much-raided Pyongyang. The people took courage from an art which portrayed their life and their hopes. A new form emerged, that of mobile art-exhibitions which took place in the open air; in congested underground factories.

After seeing an exhibition of their work, several Korean artists apologised for not being able to show me the ancient collections of Korean Art. Whether the subject was too painful to discuss or out of respect for my feelings, I was only to learn later that there are literally no national art treasures left. With a barbarism reminiscent of the *Wehrmacht*, American forces systematically or wantonly destroyed the ancient cultural relics of the Korean people. They bombed and set fire to innumerable ancient temples, the old tombs with their priceless and irreplaceable frescoes, the pavilions and gate towers which were built many centuries ago. Precious monuments of a rich cultural heritage of an ancient people which often had no relation whatsoever to strategic objectives. Whether a building was protected under the Rules of War or not, made no difference.

But the devastation of this war of aggression, its utter and complete disregard for human life and cultural achievement found more than an equal in the tenacity, the courage and the strength of the Korean people. That the forces of peace in the long run, *are* stronger than the forces of war.

I will always remember this when I think of Korea.

## PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

### BOOKS

- Dialectics of Nature, by Frederick Engels. Lawrence & Wishart. 496 pp. 3s. 6d.  
 The Atom Spy Hoax, by Wm. A. Reuben. Action Books, New York. 504 pp. \$3.75.  
 J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. XI. Lawrence & Wishart. 398 pp. 5s.  
 The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo, Vol. X, P. Sraffa and M. H. Dobb. Cambridge University Press. 424 pp. 24s.  
 The Fourth Programme, by W. S. Adams. Lawrence & Wishart. 64 pp. 5s.  
 The True Apology of Socrates, by Costa Varnati. Zeno. 80 pp. 4s. 6d.  
 Peaceful Co-existence, by Andrew Rothstein. Penguin Books. 192 pp. 2s.  
 The Film and the Public, by Roger Manvell. Pelican Books. 352 pp. 3s. 6d.

### PAMPHLETS

- Facts on Formosa. Labour Research Department. 8 pp. 3d.  
 Irishmen Make Good Trade Unionists. Irish Democrat. 32 pp. 9d.  
 Formosa: Secrets Behind the Crisis, by Gordon Schaffer. Britain-China Friendship Association. 12 pp. 4d.  
 Hands That Move Mountains: Poems by Frances Moore. Central Books. 20 pp. 9d.

# OLD CHINA

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**W**HEN Francis Bacon, 'the real progenitor of English materialism', uttered his famous aphorism on the discoveries of printing, gunpowder and the magnet, saying that 'these three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world, the first in literature, the second in warfare, the third in navigation; whence have followed innumerable changes', he was completely unaware that these were Chinese in origin. Bacon may be excused his ignorance. But three hundred years later when the very learned J. B. Bury wrote on the same topic he failed to give due acknowledgement to the Chinese, a wilful ignorance that may not be excused. Even today, though it is common knowledge that paper, silk and porcelain came to Europe from China, it is not widely realised that a score of other techniques from metallurgical blowing-engines to the humble wheelbarrow were originally devised in China. The self-satisfied ignorance of Europeans in their high capitalist period (for example, the poet Tennyson's presumptuous line—'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay') had its explanation in the predatory policies of the European powers. In 1912, a year after the fall of the Manchu dynasty (1644-1911), Lenin began an article with the words 'Progressive and civilised Europe takes no interest in the regeneration of China' and went on:

How can Europe's indifference to this be explained? By the fact that everywhere in the West the rule of the imperialist bourgeoisie prevails, the rule of a bourgeoisie which is almost rotten to the core and ready to sell its entire 'civilisation' to any adventurer in return for 'strict' measures against the workers, or for an extra five kopeks' profit on the rouble. This bourgeoisie regards China *only* as booty.

Today, the situation is changed. The armed robbers, receivers and sneak thieves have been driven off. In the words of Mao Tse-tung, 'China has stood up'. The conference at Bandung, where the Chinese in their speeches imparted self-confidence to the delegates from states formerly victims of colonialism and now comprising more than half mankind, is a sign of the new era. Wilful ignorance can no longer subsist. There is now a thirst for knowledge of China. Delegations from all parts of Europe have been streaming to the Chinese People's Republic in these last five years: and information about it is eagerly sought alike by friend and foe.

This thirst for knowledge, though primarily for what is new in China, cannot be limited to that but must seek to understand the