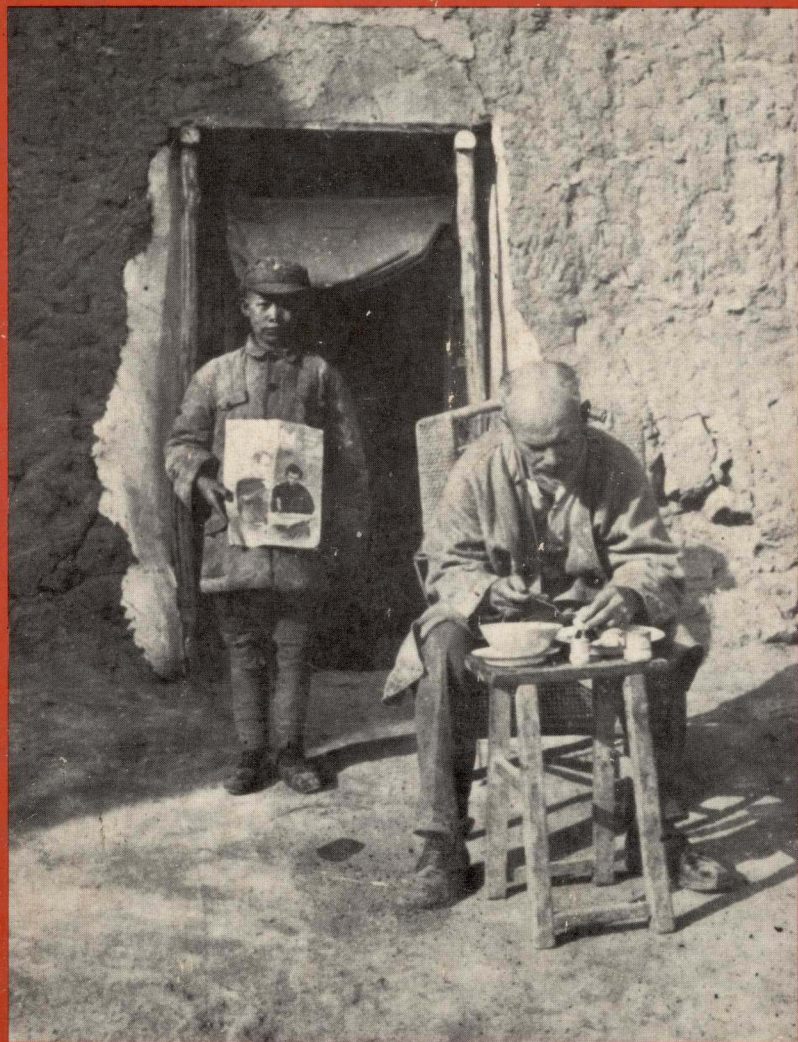


# The Scalpel, the Sword

The Story of Doctor Norman Bethune

by Sydney Gordon and Ted Allan



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*The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune*

*by*

*Sydney Gordon and Ted Allan*

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# *The Scalpel, the Sword*

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*The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune*

## Foreword to the Revised Edition

In the 20 years since its first appearance in Canada and the United States, *The Scalpel, the Sword* has made its way round the world. It has been published in a score of languages, ranging from Hebrew to Chinese. We can no longer say how many millions of people on all the continents have read it.

Dr. Norman Bethune, his life and his work, have been accepted as part of their own heritage by North American students, British workers, German medical men, Italian intellectuals, by masses of the dispossessed in India, by African freedom-fighters, by the millions of China.

What is the reason for the tremendous impact Bethune's life story has had all over the world? The answer can best be sought in the book itself. But certain preliminary points can be made here.

Bethune was a unique Canadian, a unique human being, yet he was also shaped both by his country and the contemporary world. He was truly a neo-Renaissance figure, driven by the necessity to experience and enrich all of life. To him, encrusted conventions were silly; love, a great hunger and an affirmation of life; medicine and surgery, his art, his work, his commitment; the growing brutality in our world, a personal wound. At the end, his confrontation with death as a surgeon-soldier-partisan was a natural response to the cry of the starving, the downtrodden, the brave on all the battlefields of freedom.

He was a man who achieved painful consciousness of his weaknesses. But instead of succumbing to them, he reached greatness in vanquishing them. He turned his back on his life as a sybarite, a roisterer, a darling of women and became the front-line doctor, the guerrilla in bast shoes, the revolutionary for whom life was comradeship with the people, a few handfuls of rice per day, and surgery performed in the midst of bloody and now

## FOREWORD

famous battles. He found his final, indestructible strength in his vast dream of remaking the world. At the end, his personal life merged with the fate of the world's peoples. Today, wherever their cause has triumphed, he is honored. Wherever it still has to be won, he is a banner, a call to arms.

A word on the book itself.

This new edition for the United States confronted the authors with the question of amplification and revision. Unfortunately, it has turned out to be impossible to undertake that work in depth. We have found that the 20 years since the first edition have not only produced many new realignments in the world; they have also created divergent views on a number of questions between the authors themselves. To achieve unanimity on many aspects of the work of revision, we found, would have required more time than the pace of the world has granted us. It is our view that presenting the story of Dr. Bethune to a new and wider public was more important than waiting until we could agree on how every "i" should be dotted, and every "t" crossed, and every evaluation revised with the wisdom of hindsight. The reader will make his own judgments, and Bethune's own life and ideas are in any event his most eloquent testimonials.

We have, of course, included a number of obvious revisions dictated, and made possible, by new information. And we are cheered by the fact that this presentation of Bethune's story, like Bethune himself, has only been confirmed by the history of the last two decades.

—The Authors

1973

## Preface

IN COMPARISON with the human world of past times, our world is highly complex. Because of its highly developed communications, events in every part of the globe and of human society are closely interconnected. There are no isolated disasters and there is no progress that does not help the progress of all.

This situation is reflected in the minds of men. The contents of men's minds have also become world-wide in scope and complexity. It is not enough for a man, seeking the welfare of his own people and country, to consider his domestic situation in relation to his immediate neighbors. World trends encompass every one of us, and it is by participating in them and contributing to them that we influence our own future. The highest task before men's minds today is to understand, to fight against the forces of regression and death, to strengthen and convert into reality the possibilities which our world offers, as no previous world has offered, for a fuller life for all men.

The hero in any age is one who carries out with a surpassing degree of devotion, determination, courage, and skill the main tasks with which his times challenge every man. Today these tasks are world-wide, and the contemporary hero — whether he works at home or in a foreign land — is a world hero, not only in historical retrospect but now.

Norman Bethune was such a hero. He lived, worked and fought in three countries — in Canada, which was his native land; in Spain, where forward-looking men of all nations flocked to fight in the first great people's resistance to the darkness of Nazism and fascism; and in China, where he helped our guerrilla armies to capture and build new bases of national freedom and democracy in territory which the military fascists of Japan fondly hoped they had conquered, and where he helped us forge the mighty peoples' army which finally liberated all China. In a special sense

## PREFACE

he belongs to the peoples of these three countries. In a larger sense he belongs to all who fight against oppression of nations and of peoples.

Norman Bethune was a doctor, and he fought with and within his profession with the weapons he knew best. He was an expert and a pioneer in his own science—he kept his weapons sharp and fresh. And he devoted his great skill, consciously and consistently, to the vanguards of the struggle against fascism and imperialism. To him fascism was the disease holding a greater evil for mankind than any other, a plague that destroys minds and bodies by tens of millions, and by denying the value of man also denies the value of all the sciences which have arisen to minister to man's health, vigor and growth.

The value of the techniques Norman Bethune taught his Chinese students under Japanese gunfire was determined by the purpose for which they were used. Germany and Japan were countries of high technical development, but because they were led by enemies of human progress their science and their skills brought only misfortune to mankind. Fighters for the people have the duty of attaining the highest technical skill, because only in their hands can technique really serve man.

Dr. Bethune was the first medical man to bring blood banks to the battlefields, and his transfusions saved the lives of hundreds of fighters for the Spanish Republic. In China he launched and practiced the slogan, "Doctors! Go to the wounded! Do not wait for them to come to you." In an environment totally different, and far more backward than that of Spain, he organized a procedure of guerrilla medical service which saved tens of thousands of our best and bravest. His plans and practice were based not only on medical science and experience, but also on military and political study and experience on the fronts of the people's war. Bethune in Spain and China was a pioneer in the battlefield of medicine.

He understood thoroughly the conditions, strategy, tactics and terrain of the struggle, and he knew what could be expected of medical workers who were free men, fighting beside other free men for their homes and their future. The doctors, nurses and orderlies whom he trained learned to regard themselves not only as technical auxiliaries but as front-line soldiers, with tasks as responsible and important as those of the fighting branches.



## PREFACE

These things Dr. Bethune accomplished amid conditions such as no medical man without a broad understanding of his tasks could possibly have coped with. He accomplished them in mountain villages in the most primitive parts of China, almost without any previous knowledge of the language, of the people among whom he worked, and without any strength in his own tuberculosis-ravaged body apart from his burning conviction and iron will.

His broad world understanding, the sources of power that he drew from it, were the things that give his work more universal meaning for our time than that of other medical heroes who labored against similar heart-breaking conditions, such as Father Damien or Dr. Grenfell in Labrador.

What killed Dr. Bethune? Dr. Bethune fell in the fight against fascism and reaction to which he had given his passion, skill and strength. The region in which he worked was not only blockaded by the Japanese enemy. It was blockaded also by Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary government which had always been ready to compromise victory rather than fight a people's war. The men whom Bethune fought for were adjudged unworthy not only of arms and ammunition but even of medical supplies to heal their wounded. They died of infections because they could not receive modern antidotes.

Bethune died of septicemia, the result of operating without rubber gloves and of having no sulfa drugs for treatment.

The International Peace Hospitals which Dr. Bethune founded now work under new conditions — China, at last, is free. But after Bethune died his appointed successor, Dr. Kisch, who worked beside him in Spain, was prevented by Chiang Kai-shek's blockade from assuming his post. Dr. Kotnis of the Indian Medical Units, who finally took up the directorship of one of Dr. Bethune's hospitals and valiantly carried on his work, also died at his post — again because there were no drugs on hand to treat him. Dr. Bethune and Dr. Kotnis were two among many victims, who, were it not for the blockade, might still be living and fighting in the cause of the world's free peoples.

I am very happy to introduce the life of Dr. Norman Bethune to greater numbers of people than have hitherto been able to acquaint themselves

## PREFACE

with the life of this hero of our time, who symbolizes so nobly the common stake of all people in the fight for freedom. His life, death and heritage have been particularly close to me, not only because of the great services he performed in our peoples' war of national liberation, but also because of my own activity in the China Welfare League of which I am chairman. The League has been directed toward securing support for the Bethune Peace Hospital and Bethune Medical School network that carries on his work and his memory.

The new China will never forget Dr. Bethune. He was one of those who helped us become free. His work and his memory will remain with us forever.

SOONG CHING-LING (MADAME SUN YAT-SEN)

## Contents

<i>Foreword to the Revised Edition</i>	vii
<i>Preface by Madame Sun Yat-sen</i>	ix
PART ONE: Death and Birth	i
PART TWO: The Enemy — Tuberculosis	45
PART THREE: The Enemy — Fascism	109
PART FOUR: The Enemy — Those Who Make the Wounds	169
<i>Epilogue</i>	318
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	320

*PART ONE*

Death and Birth



## I

### *Hopei, North China. . . .*

THEY BROUGHT HIM OUT of the hills over the twisting, narrow passes where the enemy feared to set foot and where the horses no longer led but followed.

They carried him on one of the litters for the wounded. At first he had waved aside the litter-bearers with an angry toss of his head and mounted his brown mare, sitting in the saddle with his left arm dragging. But before they had gone many li from Sky-Kissing Peak he had fallen into a dead faint. When he awoke to find himself on a stretcher suspended from two crossbars, moving rhythmically with the motion of the litter-bearers, he only rolled his eyes to look at them and made no protest.

For a day and a night they crawled up and down the mountain wasteland of West Hopei, a silent, dogged caravan of men, horses, and mules. By day the November sun was like a great, single eye, filmed over as if with tears, staring at them out of furrowed brows of clouds. At night the stars hung low above the cliffs, as if to touch them with a cold warmth and light their way. By day and by night it seemed they need only reach out to touch the sky. With the sound of artillery still echoing like distant thunder behind them, they made their way through dust, through mists spread out over the hollows like silvery lakes, passes cut out of sheer rock, wild brush where every step was a struggle. Then they broke out of the towering mountains, and stocky Tung Yueh Chian, leading now on the brown mare, raised his hand. They halted, gazing at the broad valley below, and Fong spoke:

"It will be Yellow Stone Village there," he said, pointing, and they began the descent.

## THE SCALPEL, THE SWORD

For an hour they zigzagged down the mountainside until they could clearly see the brown houses of Yellow Stone Village and the tiny figures racing in from the fields. When they reached the valley a crowd had gathered at the northern gate, and as they approached the village a triumphant cheer echoed through the valley.

"Pai Chu En! Pai Chu En!"

At the edge of the village the people chanted the name, waving their hands and smiling broadly. But as the brown mare reached the gate and the caravan entered, the shouts of welcome died on their lips. With troubled faces they watched Fong, slumped forward in the saddle, his head bowed, pain and defeat in his eyes. They moved apart to let Fong pass, murmuring among themselves. Where was Pai Chu En? Why did the procession enter the village so silently? Why did the litter-bearers walk with their eyes fixed on the ground? Then they saw the stretcher coming slowly through the gate, and their faces grew wrinkled with torment and disbelief.

Tung reined in the mare, the caravan came to a stop, the litter-bearers knelt to lower the stretcher carefully to the ground, hanging their heads as if they felt themselves accountable for their burden.

The villagers slowly assembled about the stretcher. Yes, it was Pai Chu En, the foreign one, White Seek Grace. Only two weeks ago he had passed like a whirlwind through the village, his proud, white head held high as he galloped before the caravan into the hills. Only two weeks ago he had left for the front, and now he lay before them, his head thrown back, his eyes shut, his beard pointing towards the sky. They looked on in baffled silence. Yes, it was Pai Chu En, but how could this be — that he should lie here like the dead? In all the liberated areas he had worked his wonders. His face had lit up the villages of Shansi. He had blazed his way across the Middle Plain, across Hopei and Shensi. He had made fools of the invaders even in the occupied territories. His name had been like a sword against the enemy. Could this be?

They looked to Tung for a sign that all would be well, then looked back at Pai Chu En. Surely of all the wonders he had performed he had some still left for himself; surely he would rise up in a moment, straight and erect, with the awe and power of a pillar of fire, his white mane tower-

## DEATH AND BIRTH

ing above them, his arms outstretched to reassure them, his green eyes smiling as always. But as they watched he twisted suddenly in pain, tearing the blankets from him, and they saw the bandages and the path of hideously discolored, swollen flesh reaching to the shoulder.

They fell back with a groan, the children clinging to their elders' legs, the litter-bearers wincing.

Pai Chu En opened his eyes as if from a deep sleep, raised himself up on an elbow and looked about till he saw Tung. He spoke for a while in the strange language that only Tung understood, and fell back wearily again.

Tung dismounted and faced the villagers. "We must stop here," he said heavily. "We are a day and a night from the front without pause. He can travel no further. He must have rest so that he can defeat his great sickness."

One of the elders stepped forward. He stood before the stretcher and bowed gravely in the traditional Hopei manner. "At first we thought it might be the enemy coming out of the hills, and we were filled with worry," he said. "Then we recognized the brown mare and the litter-bearers, and we were filled with joy. Now we are filled with grief. . . . Better that it should have been the enemy, better *Chian Pi Ching Y'eh*,<sup>1</sup> better that our homes should now be ashes, and our families scattered in the mountains, than that you should return to us in this suffering."

Pai Chu En turned his head and extended his hand vaguely.

"We must have a suitable place," Tung said, "till we are able to move him again."

The old man rose. "At the house of Yu the landlord. His is the best house in the village."

They followed the stretcher to Yu's courtyard, waiting outside, while the children watched their elders, quick to read the signs on their parents' faces, sensitive to the menace hanging over the valley, the mountains of Hopei, the whole vast world of China, and wondering now at the sorrow more terrible than the enemy that had cast its shadow over the village. . . .

Late in the afternoon there was a second alarm. This time it was a messenger hastening through the mountains from Staff Headquarters.

<sup>1</sup> The slogan of "scorched earth."



## THE SCALPEL, THE SWORD

He had set out on direct orders from General Nieh as soon as Headquarters had received the wireless message from the front the day before. The news had caused great consternation, and had been relayed to Mao Tse-tung in Yen-an immediately. General Nieh had been instructed in urgent messages from Yen-an to keep Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung informed of all developments, and to spare no cost in the effort to get Pai Chu En safely to Staff Headquarters. Though worn and hungry from his journey the messenger refused food impatiently. "Pai Chu En is ill, and in Wu Tai Shan and Yen-an they are waiting for word," he said. "Do you know what our men will say if anything goes wrong, and do you offer me food? I want to see him at once."

Fong led Nieh's representative into the house, thinking it would be good for Pai Chu En to know that the vigil was being kept not only here, beside the *k'ang*<sup>2</sup> in the house of Yu, not only here in Yellow Stone Village, not only at Sky-Kissing Peak, where the men had watched him leave with the sickness upon him, but in all the territories of Chin-Cha-Chi.

The villagers waited for word, but as the hours passed and the two remained in the house, they slipped away. The men returned to the fields, turning often as they worked to shield their eyes from the sun and look back at the village with a preoccupied air. From their meager stores the women brought baskets of chicken, millet pancakes, eggs, vegetables, leaving them at Yu's door. In the single rutted street the children hushed one another at their play. Shou, the "little devil,"<sup>3</sup> crept to Pai Chu En's door, refusing to leave and asking all who went in or out, "Will he be well enough to leave tomorrow? Shall I bring him some food? Can I ask him if he would like some food?"

All through the night Fong remained in the room. In the morning he came out with a distracted look on his long face and made off rapidly through the village. Tung found him outside the village gate, sitting on a rock, gazing vacantly into the distance. Tung squatted silently beside him, tracing patterns in the dusty earth with a stick. The sun was still

<sup>2</sup> A low brick or clay oven which also serves as a bed.

<sup>3</sup> Boys under sixteen who accompanied the Red Army on the "Long March" were nicknamed "little devils."