

COMRADE BETH

by Cassandra Sanders

"ATTACK ! BETHUNE IS WITH US!"

"Attack! Bethune is here to care for the wounded!"

His name sparked the courage of thousands of Chinese soldiers fighting to rid their country of Japanese invasion. It did not matter that his own homeland lay three thousand miles across the sea, for Doctor Henry Norman Bethune had a habit of becoming the battle cry for whatever cause he chose to champion.

The day Canada entered the First World War, Bethune, aged twenty-four, had been the tenth man in Toronto to enlist; after demobilization in London, he was only one of many who found themselves dislocated in an unhinged world. For the small-town boy from Gravenhurst, Ontario, of solid Scottish ancestry and son of a Presbyterian minister, it didn't take long for the uninhibited atmosphere of post-war London to make her siren self felt. Having pinched pennies to work his way to a medical degree at the University of Toronto, and with four years of his youth caught up in the war, the young Bethune was now eager to taste to the full the spirit of abandon permeating London. To do so, he needed more money than could be afforded from his salary at the hospital where he was interning. He had an excellent artistic taste but little money to indulge the hospital where he was interning. He had excellent artistic taste but little money to indulge it; yet there were many in London with limitless funds and little taste. He decided he would try to do something about bridging the gap, and during his off hours he began making side trips to ware-houses in France and Spain, ferreting out objets d'art to sell to London art dealers. On the ensuing profits, Bethune quickly slid into the habit of spending and lending lavishly on food, drink, clothes, nightclubs, books, paints and friends. He grew an elegant mustache, took to sporting a cane, and generally cut quite a dazzling figure among the young bohemians who gathered in his Soho flat to share his liberally dispensed inherited liquor. They assumed he had inherited money from Canada, and Norman, enjoying his new role of ease, didn't try to dissuade them. For three years he luxuriated in high living. The living grew even higher when the wife of a wealthy industrialist, who was also head of the clinic where he worked, provided him with the funds to complete his exams for a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons at the University of Edinburgh.

While in Edinburgh, Bethune met a girl from an upper-class Scottish family, twenty-two-year-old Frances Campbell Penney. He swept the re-served and sheltered Frances into a whirlwind courtship which ended in marriage a few months later, and with the support of her inheritance, frolicked around Europe on a combination honey-moon and study tour, observing the work of top European surgeons.

Once settled in Detroit, Michigan, in the fall of 1924, Bethune began two of the unhappiest years of his life. Within six months he had built up a successful practice, yet he was miserable. He devoted himself to the making of money, while despising the very methods by which he was making it, and he began to alienate his colleagues with outspoken criticism of the medical profession. "A Philadelphia lawyer is a paragon of virtue compared to some of us", he said; "When I give a woman a simple tonic where a good, bracing set of exercises would do just as well, I collect a fantastic fee and am a success." His boyhood dream of becoming a great surgeon now seemed out of place in face of the worldly tastes he had acquired, yet without that dream he was discontent, irritable, disillusioned.

His marriage began to fluctuate according to his moods: there were brutal separations and ecstatic reconciliations, each as hard on him as on the reticent Frances.

Unexpectedly the bitterness ended in a dramatic climax. In 1926 he was struck down by active pulmonary tuberculosis, for which at that time there was no cure. He knew he was dying, and insisted that Frances disentangle her young life, get a divorce and return to Scotland. Now complete in his despair, he gave his last farewells to the world and buried himself in the Trudeau Sanatorium at Saranac Lake, New York. He was finished with everyone and everything: "I have no regrets. I'm tired. Anything coming after this would be an anticlimax."

In a sanatorium cottage named "The Lea" on the slopes of Mount Pishah, Bethune joined three other men to wait out the death sentence which tuberculosis had pronounced for them. Around the walls of "The Lea" in a wild moment of despair Bethune scrawled a coloured mural, five feet high and sixty feet long, depicting allegorically nine phases of his life: his past as a predestined tubercular patient and his foredoomed future as he imagined it. Under the final scene he wrote: Sweet Death, thou kindest Angel of them all, In thy soft arms, at last, O, let me fall. Bright stars are out, long gone the burning sun;
My little act is over, and the tiresome play is done.

The play, on the contrary, had only just begun.

A year passed and the infection in Bethune's left lung had spread. One day he chanced upon a book, *The Surgery of Pulmonary Tuberculosis*, in which was outlined a new method for treating tuberculosis, called artificial pneumothorax, by which air is pumped into the chest, compressing the infected lung into a collapsed state of complete rest. For the first time since coming to Trudeau Bethune allowed himself to hope. He rushed to the administration building, broke into the middle of a staff meeting and demanded artificial pneumothorax. When one of the doctors carefully explained that such treatment was still in the experimental stage and necessarily involved risks, Bethune bared his chest and laughed aloud: "Gentlemen, I welcome the risk !" The effect of the treatment was immediate: within two months the cavities in his left lung had healed and Bethune was able to leave Trudeau. Before going, he drafted a plan for a university programme to be conducted in the sanatorium by professors with tuberculosis, for patients on the road to recovery. Courses of study would be geared to preparing patients vocationally and psychologically for their return to normal life. Ten years later at Saranac Lake his dream became a reality.

It is a recognized fact that the mind of a tubercular victim, if already gifted intellectually, is stimulated to greater achievements when excited by the toxins of tuberculosis. Though by keeping his left lung deflated Bethune eventually defeated the disease, he seems never to have recovered from its euphoric after-effects.

He arrived in Montreal in high spirits to study under Dr. Edward Archibald, famed chest surgeon at the Royal Victoria Hospital. But Bethune was too exuberant, too impetuous, too headstrong, to fit into the mould of sober living deemed appropriate for those engaged in the serious business of chest surgery. An operation taking most doctors two hours would be whipped through by Bethune in fifteen minutes, and he shouted torrents of abuse at any nurses unable to keep up with his fast and furious pace. Halfway through a surgical operation he would become impatient with a surgical instrument not performing exactly as he felt it should, and fling it to the floor : with the operation finished, he would storm off to his study and scribble away at diagrams until he had come up with an idea for a new instrument to replace it. He had a marked genius for mechanical innovations, some of which are still used today under his name.

Many of his fellow surgeons at the hospital, ruffled by his rebellious independence or envious of

his achievements, accused him of precocious exhibitionism and voiced suspicions that beneath his surface glitter lay little profound knowledge of medicine. But though he was intolerant with nurses and equipment which failed him, in research he had infinite patience and was forever testing and perfecting new ideas in the laboratory. More than a dozen papers of lasting significance resulted from his work at this time.

Yet not all his manuscripts were published. One evening in front of the fire with a friend, Bethune read aloud one of the papers over which he had laboured long and hard. The friend interrupted frequently with criticism. Finally Bethune looked up at him. "What you really mean is this seems to be a bad book," he said, and flung the pages into the fire.

An innovator in dress as well as surgery, Bethune disdained the outfits of the conventional doctor, whom he described as looking like "a cross between a mortician and a 'maitre d'hôtel.'" Instead he would don purple trousers and a gray jacket, or an outfit patchworked together from a pork-pie hat, dark shirt, silk tie, impeccably tailored tweed jacket and gray flannels. One friend recently recalled, "He was the first man I ever saw wearing suede shoes. If he were here today I'd say he would make a beautiful beatnik."

Frances had finally succumbed to a barrage of letters begging her to return, and they were married again. But even amidst their new-found companionship old tensions re-asserted themselves, and within a year Frances asked for a divorce —this time for good. By now, Bethune's daily routine called for about six operations at Dr. Archibald's clinic, lectures at McGill University, involvement in several public causes, and the occasional trip to Trudeau Sanatorium to demonstrate thoracic operative techniques. In the evenings, to dissipate a gnawing loneliness for Frances, he plunged headlong into Montreal's social whirlpool. He had always been attractive to women, and the admiration had been frankly mutual: now an available bachelor, he was sought after by women as partner in what they hoped would be an unending "marry-go-round" of partying. He was a social lion, but one who could never be tamed into following the dictates of social custom. He scorned dinner jackets in favour of turtle-neck sweaters; at gatherings of his more pompous colleagues he would loudly declare that a surgeon differed from a plumber only in that he wasn't always as skilled; and when he became bored with a particular group he would abruptly leave without explanation or apology. He was exasperating, exhausting, but nonetheless rewarding to know.

As a successful surgeon Bethune was earning an extravagant salary, but spending it extravagantly. As he lived, so he bought — on impulse. His Beaver Hall apartment was filled with reflections of his penchant for the luxurious, the sensuous and the artistic: deep-piled rugs, rich hangings, paintings and objets d'art by the young Canadian artists he helped support, furniture of his own design. As well, the apartment more often than not overflowed with those friends, actors and young artists with whom he loved to share all that gave him pleasure. They had free run of the apartment, and each of his innumerable books bore the inscription : "This book belongs to Norman Bethune and his friends."

Once when a young lady admired a pair of full-length, blood-red velveteen drapes, Bethune picked up a pair of scissors, cut away half of one of the drapes and tossed the material across the room to her.

"What have you done !" she cried in dismay.

"Given you something you like. What else?"

On occasion friends also shared in the decorating chores. At one evening party Bethune announced that he needed a new wallpaper in the bathroom. The guests smeared their mouths, hands and feet with lipstick and set about printing a figured wallpaper for him. And it was across

these same bathroom walls that Bethune, with that special flourish with which he loved to milk dry any and all of society's sacred cows, hung his diplomas — diplomas which other doctors displayed with pride in their offices.

Bethune's personality had a disconcerting, physical impact on everything and everybody with which he came into contact. Just as he reacted forcibly to whatever surrounded him, so he forced his environment to react strongly to him. Nothing that knew his touch remained unstirred, and opinions about him varied widely. Some said he was mad, others swore he was a genius; some called him arrogant, vain and a showman, others declared him a sensitive and brilliant man. His very impetuosity, his rash, ingenuous way of throwing himself wholly into a moment and responding to the emotions and events around him, drained him of any restraint he might otherwise have had. It was his disruptive vitality — the characteristic that singled him out from everyone else around him — which made him so violently impulsive. Yet there were moments when his energy would suddenly expend itself. At such moments his bitter rebellion against the pretentiousness of his profession would dissolve into a brooding reverence for the doctor's role: "We should be like monks going about in sandals and bare garments. Our purpose is to guard and resurrect the human body. It should be a holy purpose, and our dedication should be as holy as our purpose." The boyhood dream still sought a cause to embrace.

When he accepted a position to head a new chest surgery department in the Sacre Coeur hospital, twenty miles from Montreal, Bethune was free to develop and refine his own theories. He always worked best under his own direction, when his headstrong temperament had no superior authority with which to clash. Both hospital and surgeon flourished: the new clinic soon became an important force in the surgical treatment of tuberculosis in French Canada, and the years Bethune spent at its helm were among the most productive in his short surgical career.

Tubercular eases which a few years ago would have been deemed hopeless were now being cured by the surgical techniques employed at Bethune's clinic. Yet he became aware of a curious contradiction: for every cure, ten new cases flared into the open. Tuberculosis fed on poverty — and five years after the stock market crash, poverty itself was a spreading disease.

Something had to be done to prevent, not cure, tuberculosis, and Bethune the idealist was seized with a new concept for universal health protection. His whole being responded with characteristic enthusiasm: "The doctor must go to the people. Into every house, into every city, into every village. From door to door. Me and others who will go with me. Others who believe as I do that the doctor's duty is to act, to go to the source of the disease. If there are men who respond to the appeal of the church sufficiently to abandon all their worldly possessions and take up the frugal life of a monastery, then there will be doctors ready to set aside private gain in order to become priests in the service of the people's health. We'll go into the slums, into the districts where the need is greatest. For ourselves we will need nothing. We'll live on what we can get — nickles, dimes, dollars. It will be enough." Bethune had become a healer of the social ills causing disease.

With the impulsiveness with which he threw himself into any new cause that excited him, Bethune offered free medical care to any man, woman or child sent to him by the Montreal Unemployed Association. He wrote his feelings in a diary: "The rich can take care of themselves; but who will look after the poor? They live without even the knowledge, so many of them, of their natural right to healthy bodies. My new friends and 'non-paying' patients, however, aren't backward about asserting their natural rights. One can't help admiring the spirit of some of these people. They have nothing, yet in their murky meeting halls, under the police clubs, they weave a rich and optimistic dream. It is hard to follow them sometimes, even harder sometimes

to agree with their knotty theorizing, but easy to share the excitement and enthusiasm minted of their wants, deprivations and single-mindedness. I feel I have set my feet on a new road."

The road was to lead farther than even Bethune could visualize, but for the moment it was enough that the workers accepted him as one of their own, as had the struggling young Montreal artists, and now referred to him as "Comrade Beth" — a title he bore with more pride than any of the honorary degrees or advisory committee titles he had by now accumulated as an acclaimed thoracic surgeon.

"In our highly geared, modern industrial society there is no such thing as private health — all health is public." In 1936 one hundred doctors, dentists, nurses and social workers joined Bethune to form the Montreal Group for the Security of the People's Health, with the aim of promoting compulsory health insurance for all wage-earners and adequate medical care to all unemployed. The Group sparked heated controversy among Montreal medical circles, but a milestone had been reached in Canadian medical history.

"Bound by the rigid and inexorable laws of his medium, the human body, the surgeon is permitted but few of the liberties his fellow crafts-men may take who work with stone, wood or metal.

"He is not allowed the exhibition of playful fancies, wit or humour, which other craftsmen enjoy in their productions. But, for all that, our craftsman often has the soul of a creative artist, although the nature of his plastic medium restricts the free play of his artistic nature."

Not one to be bound within any limits, Bethune found release and relaxation in his own painting and sculpture. As with all of his projects, he gave himself up to painting with abandonment and complete absence of convention. An exhibition of his work held in Montreal gave sufficient indication that had he chosen to study art instead of medicine he would undoubtedly have made a name for himself as a painter. With Fritz Brandtner, exponent of a new theory on the art of training children, he founded the Children's Art Centre — first of its kind in Canada — for underprivileged children from five to fifteen. Three afternoons a week the floor of his living room was carpeted with children absorbed in expressing their un-hampered imaginations; and every Saturday Bethune took them on a tour of the art galleries, explaining the aims and achievements of the various artists, classic and modern. The School created considerable stir in Montreal art circles — but then, so did any project associated with the name of the ubiquitous Dr. Bethune.

In his few spare moments, Bethune designed an entire model city for the rehabilitation of tubercular patients, including plans for hygienic homes, parks, children's playgrounds, hospitals and industrial buildings. The city was conceived as a substitute for the unhealthy atmosphere of a normal city, to which patients would otherwise have to return, and to provide instead a place to live in the sunshine and clean outdoor air. Yet even as his plans reached the hands of government officials, Bethune's attention was being caught by the cries of agony erupting from Spain.

A few months after the Spanish Civil War broke out he set sail for Spain as head of the Canadian Medical Mission, throwing overboard his brilliant career as one of the leading and most highly paid thoracic surgeons in Canada as well as his nine-year crusade against tuberculosis. But in the Loyalists' struggle against France's Falangists who had uprooted the elected government he saw consequences more far-reaching than the boundaries of Spain. "The revolution of the workers against economic, religious and intellectual slavery happened to have occurred this year in Spain. It might just as well have happened in a dozen other countries. What Spain does today will decide the future of the world for the next hundred years." The ideals to which he clung to combat his private disillusionments with the world had found an international stage on which to

fight the cause of humanity.

Upon his arrival in Madrid, Bethune organized the Spanish-Canadian Institute for Blood Transfusion, along the lines, as he jokingly referred to it, of a "glorified milk delivery system" — a central station which delivered blood for the wounded to one hundred sub-stations strung along a front covering more than four hundred miles. He found a way to preserve blood for two or even three weeks, and where refrigerating stations were not available, the precious blood containers were kept in cold mountain streams close to the firing line.

Within the first six months, between three and four hundred lives were saved by blood transfusion, and the first mobile blood transfusion unit ever to operate on a battlefield was declared a success. In an exultant mood, Bethune cabled home: "Madrid is centre of gravity of the world." Ideas tumbled from Bethune's inventive mind: for a convalescent club for those German, French, English, Italian and Polish discharged members of the International Brigade who would otherwise be left to wander about Madrid lonely and discouraged; for an International Nursing Corps of French, German and English nurses — "It is more important that a wounded man should be nursed by a woman who can speak his own language than be operated on by a surgeon who may understand nothing more than the technical problem involved." Bethune was incapable of restricting himself to the medical side of therapy.

In one of his frequent broadcasts to America he described the bombing of a poor civilian quarter of Madrid by twelve huge Italian tri-motored bombers.

"Standing in a doorway as these huge machines flew slowly overhead, each one heavily loaded with bombs, I glanced up and down the streets. People hurried to refugios; a hush fell over the city — it was a hunted animal crouched down in the grass, quiet and apprehensive. There is no escape, so be still. Then in the dead silence of the streets the songs of birds came startling clear in the bright winter air.

"After the bombs fall — and you can see them falling like great black pears — there is a thunderous roar. Clouds of dust and explosive fumes fill the air, whole sides of houses fall into the street. From heaps of huddled clothes on the cobblestones blood begins to flow — these were once live women and children.

"Many are buried alive in the ruins. One hears their cries — they cannot be reached. Burst water and gas mains add to the danger. Ambulances arrive. The blackened and crumpled bodies of the still-alive are carried away.

"Now observe the faces of, not the dead, but those who still live. Because it is the wished-for effect on them which is the motive for these massacres, not just the killing of a few hundred innocent civilians and the destruction of property, but the terrorizing of hundreds of thousands who escaped this death. They stand and watch or work themselves at the rescue. Their lips are set and cold. They don't shout or gesticulate. They look at each other sorrowfully, and when they talk of the fascist assassins, their faces express fortitude, dignity and contempt."

When Franco shifted the heat of his attack to the south, Bethune ignored all warnings and headed straight for the scene, ready to replace spilled blood. At Almeria he learned that Malaga had been bombed, and on his journey toward it he was faced with the tragic sight of thousands upon thousands of evacuees, some barely able to walk, trying to reach the relative safety of Almeria. With his Canadian companion Hazen Sise, Bethune arranged a marathon rescue relay. For two days and two nights without sleep he stayed behind caring for the wounded as they limped, crawled or fell by the wayside.

The memory of the pitiful children on the road to Almeria haunted Bethune for some weeks, and resulted in his idea of a chain of Children's Villages close to Barcelona, where the thousands of

Spanish war orphans could be cared for in comparative safety. The Spanish Aid Committee in Toronto agreed to raise money for the project, and eventually the first two Children's Villages were built.

In the spring of 1937 Bethune, ill from overwork, was told to take a few month's rest. Instead he decided to return to Canada and undertake a gruelling cross-country lecture tour to raise funds for Spain. He proved a dramatic platform speaker, and response to the tour was enthusiastic. But official Western response to the events then spinning the globe filled Bethune with exasperation : "In Spain fascism has attacked 24,000,000 people, with the United States, Britain and France embargoing the Loyalists. Now, in China, the attack has spread against nearly one quarter of the total population of the earth. If the same treacherous policy of blockading the victims and making arrangements with the aggressors is continued, we may well wonder whether any man, woman or child is safe anywhere in the world."

For Bethune the centre of gravity had now shifted to China. On January 2nd, 1938, his money-raising tour completed, he boarded a ship at Vancouver for Hong Kong to help the Chinese in their fight against the invading Japanese.

Before his departure Bethune announced to the press his official membership in the Communist Party. When a heckler cried out, "Moscow hireling!" Bethune replied calmly, "I am sure that if Christ walked the earth again, preaching the brotherhood of man, He too would have thrown at Him the label of 'Moscow hireling'."

Friends were upset by the dangerous course on which Bethune was steering his life, for to be a Communist sympathizer was a crime in the minds of those anxious to appease the Fascists. Few recognized his almost inevitable Communist affiliation as the response, not of a political analyst, but of an essentially artistic, romantic and idealistic nature.

Many felt that he had abandoned the Spanish cause, but Bethune's reason for not returning to Spain was simple. He was tired of the hypocrisy that could allow the rape of the Spanish Republic under the guise of non-intervention. Spain and China were engaged in the same war, he felt; in China the need was greatest. He was the first foreign doctor to answer China's call.

Word that he had been captured and killed by the Japanese was wired to New York just as Bethune had, in fact, safely reached the 8th Route Army of Communist guerrillas in Yen-an, after an epic three hundred mile trip on foot and by mule cart with the Japanese close behind. He discovered China to be conducting her desperate struggle against incredible odds. Lack of funds and interference by Chiang Kai Shek meant that armies were hastily trained and scantily armed. Medical services of any kind were practically non-existent.

With his genius for originating and organizing, Bethune calculated that he could save the lives of 75 per cent of the casualties if he could somehow give immediate treatment to the more seriously wounded, without the delay of transporting them to the base hospitals. He conceived the idea of medical teams which could travel directly to the fighting front, and operate on the wounded only a mile or two from the front line: "We must go to the wounded. Don't wait for the wounded to come to you."

He designed several mobile surgical units to accompany the teams, each built to fit onto the backs of two mules, and containing a collapsible operating table, a full set of surgical instruments and medical supplies. At a signal, the whole hospital unit could be packed up and on the move within half an hour, in case of sudden enemy advance.

When fighting flared up, Bethune was seldom far behind the shifting front line of the guerrilla fighters, though the routes he had to travel covered hundreds of miles at a stretch, over tortuous mountain paths and through primitive country. With at least 25,000 wounded always in the hos-

pitals, there were only five qualified Chinese doctors, fifty Chinese untrained "doctors" — usually peasants who had picked up the merest rudiments of operating by observation — and Bethune, the one foreign doctor. He founded a school for doctors and nurses, wrote and illustrated a medical textbook — there were no medical texts in the region — and while en route to the various fronts he trained illiterate peasants to act as medical assistants.

After one night of steady operating, Bethune wrote a surrealistic description of a surgeon's thoughts as the wounded pass before his eyes:

"The kerosene lamp overhead makes a steady buzzing sound like an incandescent hive of bees. Mud walls. Mud floor. Mud bed. White paper windows. Smell of blood and chloroform. Cold. Three o'clock in the morning, Dec. 1, North China, near Lin Chu, with the 8th Route Army.

"Men with wounds.

"Wounds like little dried pools, caked with black-brown earth, wounds with torn edges frilled with black gangrene; neat wounds, concealing beneath the abscess in their depths, burrowing into and around the great firm muscles like a dammed-back river, running around and between the muscles like a hot stream ; wounds, expanding outward, decaying orchids or crushed carnations, terrible flowers of flesh; wounds from which dark blood is spewed out in clots, mixed with the ominous gas bubbles, floating on the fresh flood of the still-continuing secondary hemorrhage.

"Old filthy bandages stuck to the skin with blood-glue. Careful. Better moisten first. Through the thigh. Pick the leg up. Why, it's like a bag, a long, loose, red stocking. What kind of stocking? A Christmas stocking. Where's that fine, strong rod of bone now? In a dozen pieces. Pick them out with your fingers ; white as a dog's teeth, sharp and jagged. Now feel. Any more left? Yes, here. All? Yes, No, here's another piece. Is this muscle dead? Pinch it. Yes, it's dead. Cut it out. How can that heal? How can those muscles once so strong, now so torn, so devastated, so ruined, resume their proud tension? Pull, relax. Pull, relax. What fun it was! Now that is finished. Now that's done. Now we are destroyed. Now what will we do with ourselves? An infant next. What an infant ! Seventeen. Shot through the belly. Chloroform. Ready? Gas rushes out of the opened peritoneal cavity. Odour of feces. Pink coils of distended intestine. Four perforations. Close them. Purse string suture. Sponge out the pelvis. Tube. Three tubes. Hard to close. Keep him warm. How? Dip those bricks into hot water.

"Gangrene is a cunning, creeping fellow. Is this one alive? Yes, he lives. Technically speaking, he is alive. Give him saline intravenously. Perhaps the innumerable, tiny cells of his body will remember. They may remember the hot, salty sea, their ancestral home, their first food. With the memory of a million years, they may remember other tides, other oceans and life being born of the sea and sun. It may make them raise their tired little heads, drink deep and struggle back into life again. It may do that.

"And this one. Will he run along the road beside his mule at another harvest, with cries of pleasure and happiness? No, that one will never run again. How can you run with one leg? What will he do? Why, he'll sit and watch the other boys run. What will he think? He'll think what you and I would think. What's the good of pity? Don't pity him ! Pity would diminish his sacrifice. He did this for the defence of China. Help him.

Lift him off the table. Carry him in your arms. Why, he's as light as a child! Yes, your child, my child.

"How beautiful the body is; how perfect its parts; with what precision it moves ; how obedient; proud and strong. How terrible when torn. The little flame of life sinks lower and lower, and, with a flicker, goes out. It goes out like a candle goes out. Quietly and gently. It makes its protest at extinction, then submits. It has its say, then is silent.

"Any more? Four Japanese prisoners. Bring them in. In this community of pain, there are no enemies. Cut away that blood-stained uniform. Stop that hemorrhage. Lay them beside the others. Why, they're alike as brothers! Are these soldiers professional man-killers? No, these are amateurs-in-arms. Workman's hands. These are workers-in-uniform.

"No more. Six o'clock in the morning. God, it's cold in this room. Open the door. Over the distant, dark-blue mountains, a pale faint light appears in the East. In an hour the sun will be up. To bed and sleep."

Operating in the makeshift mobile hospitals was strenuous, but conditions in the base hospitals were even worse. They had been built wherever there was space, in temples, huts or caves; they had poor lighting, benches or planks for beds, and frequently no blankets. The scant medical services that did exist were unique not only for what they did, but for what they did without. Supplies were dwindling to a trickle: lacking even ether for urgent surgery, Bethune worked on, by now bitterly resigned to the idea that the aid for which he had pleaded would not arrive. Bethune was forever surpassing his own records of endurance, exhausting even to contemplate. If at one time he performed forty operations in three days, the next time he would complete twenty-five in the course of a single night. If he operated without a break for forty hours and completed seventy-one operations, he would at another time perform a hundred and fifteen operations in a continuous stretch of sixty-nine hours while under fire from the Japanese. He survived only by the force of sheer determination and a seemingly indefatigable strength. But the hardships took their toll. The once proud, virile figure was thin and bent from inhuman exertion, the handsome face now deeply lined and scarred by suffering. At the age of forty-nine he looked seventy-five and the Chinese affectionately called him "The Old Man."

Painstaking with the lives of his patients even down to minute details of comfort, Bethune was appallingly reckless with his own. One day as the Japanese were seen advancing on the temple where he and his staff were operating, Bethune refused to evacuate before he had operated on all the wounded. In the ensuing rush he cut his finger. He had been operating without disinfectant for some time because of the desperate shortage of medical supplies, and he died of blood poisoning shortly after, in November of 1939, just two months after the rest of the Western world had awakened from its indifference to the Fascist threat.

For his friends, his sudden death seemed an almost inevitable end to his brilliant and unpredictable career. During the last quarter of his life it had been as if, having escaped death once, Bethune had lost his fear of it and had defied it to cut him down. It felled him with a chance infection.

The two years in China had fully restored his faith in himself and humanity. Shortly before his death he wrote to a friend that they had been "the most significant, the most meaningful years of my life. Sometimes it has been lonely, but I have found my highest fulfillment here among my beloved comrades." For here, quite simply, he had been needed, and the need for him had been expressed.

His death, as his life, was the subject of heated controversy. A wave of national conscience swept Canada, and newspaper editors, many of whom had berated him for his communism, worried aloud over whether Canada's native suspicion of the disruptive characteristics of genius had driven away, unhonoured, one of her own prophets.

The Chinese have commemorated Bethune with schools, hospitals, monuments, special issues of stamps and a memorial day, and have commissioned a film of his life to be based on *The Scalpel, The Sword*, the moving biography by Canadian writers Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon. But back in Canada those who have heard of him are still wondering whether he was an erratic misfit or a

visionary ahead of his time; an iconoclast or the most devout of all. Whatever the verdict, he was undeniably "an agitator, a disturber of the peace — quick, impatient, positive, restless and disquieting." So wrote Norman Bethune when defining a creative force. He may well have been inscribing his own epitaph.