



"RECORD MONTHLY"

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PEKING COURTROOM (June 20, 1956)

OUR car stops at the Middle Court of Justice in the SSu Fah Pu Ch'ieh, a narrow lane in old Peking. The courthouse is new, clean and airy, but quite unpretentious. In the courtyard are some shrubs in porcelain flowerpots and a small well-cared-for flower plot. A few people are about, but not a uniform is visible, inside or out. My companions are two Australian journalists and a Japanese lawyer, all of us desiring a close-up of Chinese Communist justice in action.

Our interpreter, after some inquiries, takes us upstairs, where we meet Mr. Lai, Vice-Director of the Middle Court and a former judge. He wears cloth-soled shoes, blue cotton trousers and a cream jacket, and his manners are, of course, impeccable. (Alone of all the people of Peking I am wearing a tie in the June heat, and regretting it.) As we sit sipping green tea Mr. Lai courteously tells us about it all. This

is both a court of appeal from the District Courts and a court of first instance in certain serious cases, with separate civil and criminal jurisdictions. The litigants may employ lawyers if they wish, but the fees go to the Bar Association, by whom they are employed, not to individuals. He mentions the fees, and we agree that they are very low indeed. Perhaps individual lawyers will be enabled to practise again in China in the future, Mr. Lai surprisingly volunteers. He has arranged for us to be present at the hearing of a divorce suit, so he goes on to give us a thumbnail sketch of the situation.

The husband is 50, the wife 32; they are three years married. Last year the husband applied for a divorce in the District Court because he was tired of his wife's quarrelling with his son and daughter-in-law by a former marriage, who live in the same courtyard. The District Court refused an order. Now, however, the wife has reopened the case, appealing on the ground that the husband loves his son and daughter-in-law too much and favours them with money and space at her expense. She demands a divorce, the right to occupy one of her husband's three houses, and 25 yuan a month to live on.

We descend to the court—a white-washed room with the judges' table slightly raised and covered with a plain white cloth. Mao Tse-Tung's portrait beams down benevolently. The three judges (two women and a man) and the girl clerk appear, together with the litigants. There is hardly time to stand before the court is seated and under way. No policeman or usher is present, nor does anyone wear any badge or mark of authority. The six participants make up a symphony in every shade of blue, looking neat and unbothered despite the heat. The parties sit elbow to elbow



a few feet in front of the judges. The woman president elicits particulars of names and profession, and it appears that the respondent is an accountant. He is a solid figure of some twelve stone, and looks like the bookkeeper of some small business. His wife is half

his size, in dark blue trousers and light blue jacket. Her hair is combed back to a simple

knot on her neck, but no single strand is out of its appointed place. In repose her face has the hue and expression of an old Ming ivory Kwan Yin.

The president patiently explains the decision of the District Court, and the husband surprisingly agrees with this excellent reasoning. Not so, however, the wife, in whose favour the decision was awarded. She embarks upon a catalogue of her husband's iniquities, and our interpreter wears a pained expression as he tries to follow her voluble Shantung speech. It seems that the son and daughter-in-law trouble has worsened. Her husband favours them at her expense, and is niggardly with the house-keeping money; a situation that can best be remedied if he will make over one of his houses to her, agree to a divorce,

(continued on next page)

BY H. W. YOUREN



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HONNEGER'S "KING DAVID"

BECAUSE of his fondness for experimenting in sound, the famed French composer Honneger, who died in November of last year, was often labelled "clever" and not taken seriously. One of his experiments in sound impressions was "Pacific 231," inspired by his passion for railway engines. An extreme venture in this field was "Rugby," which tried to capture the speed and excitement of a football match. Outside France, however, he is best known as the composer of two full-scale choral works, *King David* and *Joan of Arc at the Stake*. *King David*, which the composer describes as a symphonic psalm, is based on a play by René Morax, and took Europe by storm in the twenties. The first New Zealand performance of this work—by the National Orchestra and the Phoenix Choir—will take place in Wellington on Tuesday, November 20 (YCs, 4YZ, 9.0 p.m.). It is written for soprano, contralto and tenor soloists, chorus and orchestra, with a narrator.

The work is in three parts and altogether there are 28 items, most of them very short, many of them containing only a page or so of music. The work ends with David crowning Solomon as King—just before his death he thanks his God with "Oh, how good it was to live! I thank thee, God, Thou Who gavest me life!" This is followed by a triumphant "Alleluia" by the chorus.

The first part of this concert (which will be given a delayed broadcast on the following Sunday) will be a performance of Handel's "Dettingen Te Deum," written in 1743 when Handel was in the midst of his last great period of creativity. Handel uses the original early church chant "Te Deum Laudamus" as a Festival Hymn rather like a Jubilate. This use of the Te Deum has been a very popular one with composers from the time of Purcell to the present day. (YAs, 3YZ, 4YZ, Sunday, November 25, 2.0 p.m.)