

# INSIDE CHINA

"Desperate Need" Describes

Life in China

"Desperate need" best describes conditions of life for many millions in China today. Two UNRRA officials recently travelled more than four hundred miles through Honan on horseback, sedan chair and slow motor transport to investigate conditions there. They found that nearly two million persons or one-sixth of the estimated population of formerly Japanese-occupied Honan Province are on starvation rations, and nearly that many are without adequate clothing or shelter, as disease and epidemics sweep through the province. In the worst hit districts of western Honan, some 15 per cent of the population died of want soon after the defeat of Japan. Meanwhile, 200,000 impoverished war refugees are pouring back to western Honan only to find their homes burned, their meagre possessions looted, their crops unplanted and their tiny plots of land despoiled. Everywhere they went, the UNRRA officials were told—"Wheat was not harvested, the fall crops were not planted." Starvation victims lay in coffins awaiting death.

Famine and disease have killed off a large portion of the population of East Kwangtung. The drastic 1943-1944 famine in the region of Chao-chow and Swatow decimated the pre-occupation years' population. Even before the war it had been necessary for this predominantly fishing-area to import two-thirds of its rice. Now the section is faced with another famine as the refugees are returning to their former homes without resources—many of them having sold the very clothing off their backs to buy transportation in order to hurry home. Slow death from starvation was so constant and numerically overwhelming during the 1944 famine that:

"Coffins were lined up at a certain place in Swatow by the charitable Buddhist organization and people staggered there to lie down in the coffins and await death. In that way they were sure of some sort of burial, at least."

An UNRRA representative reported from Swatow that: "50

per cent of the population there is urgently in need of immediate food relief," and the population fluctuations in Swatow vividly demonstrate the brutal effects of war and hunger on the besieged residents there. In 1930, before the enemy occupation, there were 220,000 persons. In the same year after the occupation, there were 40,000 left—many had fled, but many had died. After the Japanese surrender, in 1945, the returning refugees swelled the population to 140,000. Because of the reduced population, housing is not a primary need in this area. But the famine had forced residents to barter their cotton-padded garments for handfuls of rice, leaving themselves with a mere rag and often only leaves for covering. And others tore down parts of their own houses to barter for food, leaving themselves at least partially homeless. The main source of food and livelihood in this section had been fishing, but of the 5,300 pre-war fishing boats of the area, less than 700 in all remain today.

"Ding-Haw" In The Changing Scene of the Provinces

China is not as yet a united nation, it is still a country made up of thirty provinces, many of them distinct entities within themselves, differing from each other in every conceivable respect: topography, stage of "westernization," habits, customs, culture, dress, language and even in the type of agricultural hand tools in use in one province totally unknown in another. The impact of western civilization had developed modernized cities along the seacoast and in the

Yangtze Valley; but cities and rural villages in the interior remained relatively unchanged and unaware of the outside world, self-contained and pretty much autonomous. So much so, that whereas the foreigner in westernized Shanghai merits no second glance from the Chinese child playing in the street, the American in Chungking and elsewhere even today, is the object of unlimited curiosity and vast amusement, and Chinese children in a good-natured fashion, will call him "Mr. Foreigner" or "Mr. Long-nose," run after him with eager friendliness mixed with frank amazement, shouting—"Haw bu haw" (How are you)—and grinning with joy when he answers, in their own language—"Ding Haw" (fine, excellent), pointing the thumb up, in the traditional gesture.

The Accent Is On The Ancient, As It Meets The Modern

The Director of UNRRA in China, while back in the United States on a brief duty visit, explained: "The old and the new go side by side in China today—with the accent on the old. You may see a modern steamer on the Yangtze River alongside of a 10-oared junk. And the oarsmen often have to get out and pull their boat from the shore. There are airplanes flying the distance from Kunming to Chungking in three hours; there are many trudging the same distance by foot, taking from thirty to sixty days. The most striking contrast of old and new is to see a plane sweep down like a beautiful bird and land on the edge of a jungle in the very heart of an ancient cart-and-bullock civilization.

"And it might be well to evaluate the 'old' that does exist in China, by the way. I lived in an area far from centers of Chinese culture, but in which an irrigation system of one million acres had been laid out in the year 150 B. C. At about the same time it was discovered that there was salt water beneath the earth's surface. Those ancient Chinese devised crude pumps to bring up the water, evaporated it and made their salt. Those pumps and wells are in use to this day. Meanwhile, plumbing remains very rare in today's China, and what there is, is very old. In new structures, the Chinese have been using the pipes remaining from bombed out houses.

"But the most striking evidence of change in today's China is in the status of the women. Women are no longer the submissive creatures they once were. They behave as freely, as uninhibitedly as the men."

71-Hour Work Day Combines Living With Labor On The Job

The working day for the Chinese runs to about seventeen hours. But his attitude towards his work is different from ours. He considers there are only about ten good hours of work in a man during the day, therefore the rest of his time is devoted to sociability. For one thing, he lives on the location of his job. For example, when a house is being built, the workers simply move to the site for the duration. "Waking at dawn, as I often do, I would look out of my window and much to my surprise see fires lighted here and there in the darkness. The men were about to go to work on a building project nearby. They

had started to cook their breakfast of rice and tea. In the same way it is customary for school teachers to live right in the school, for shopkeepers' families to live with them; and it is a not unfamiliar sight to see a wife doing the family cooking in a blacksmith shop over the fire in which her husband is heating the horse-shoes, since coal is so very scarce. By the way, an operation of household furniture moving is a funny thing in China. The men put on the job simply walk into the house, pick up the articles of furniture and walk through the streets to the new location."

"Sorry I'm Late, Our House Fell Down Last Night"

Even the best houses in Chinese villages and cities are rather frail. A good house is built with (Continued on page 7)

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