



**Christmas 1948**

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THE CHINESE CHIMES.

Winter Number.

American Board Mission, T'unghsien,  
Peiping East, China.  
December 1948

"Now is the winter of our desolation." King Richard III.

WHAT WAS WINTER?

As a Vermont lad I learned the meaning of Winter in the hard way - by experience. Winter was the time when days grew short, and nights long; it was when the ground and water pipes froze; when the earth was covered with deep snow so that wagons and wheelbarrows became useless, and were replaced by sleds and sleighs. Winter meant coughs and colds, chilblains, chapped hands and frost-bite. Winter was not a pleasant experience; it was something to be dreaded and endured, if you survived.

SPENGLER WINTERS.

Some years ago I read and reviewed Spengler's "Decline of the West" in which the author contended that history repeats itself, like the year, in four seasons, - spring, summer, autumn and winter. How far this philosophy of history is correct is a debatable question but there are times when one can see much similarity between the atmosphere of a Vermont winter and the frigid quality of some periods in history. In fact the present situation in north China is that kind of a period. At times during the past few weeks it has seemed very much as though Winter had actually arrived.

THE FIRST FROST.

The fall of Tsinan (capital of Shantung Province, south of here) a few weeks ago reminded me of my boyhood days when Mother's tomato vines and flowers turned white with frost and then black with death. That was nature's message to get ready for winter.

People in Peiping and Tientsin have been saying for some time that T'aiyuan (capital of Shansi, west of here), Mukden (capital of Fengtien, to the north) and Tsinan were the important outposts in the defenses of this area. We were told that when any one of those places fell we should begin to make plans as to where and how we would spend the winter. The political thermometer took a sudden drop when Tsinan was captured by the Communists. Some missionary friends remained, and at least one young couple spent eight or nine days in the cellar of their home, while shells exploded all around them, and one passed through the dining room over their heads. When the battle was over the Communists came in and helped themselves to what they wanted, according to reports that came to us.

Another early frost came when the missionaries were evacuated from T'aiyuan some weeks ago, though the city is such an important industrial center that the Nationalists have managed to hold it thus far. Beyond T'aiyuan, in

T'aiku and Fenyang, are four single women American Board missionaries who got caught behind the iron curtain when the Reds came. We hear from them occasionally and so far as we can judge they are not too badly off. They seem to be very busy with medical, educational and religious work. Of course their news of the outside world is what their rulers want them to hear. One news item was that Henry Wallace was having a great following in America. We didn't hear whether that information warmed their hearts or gave them chills but since three of them are "old China hands" we suspect that they took enough salt with the news so that the reaction was either neutral or negative.

The most recent frost, which was really quite a freeze, came with the fall of Mukden. This was the last city of Manchuria to go and it looked for a while as though there was very little protection between us here and the Reds in Manchuria. Recently large numbers of soldiers have come to T'unghsien and gone out east of here where it looks as if a big battle is being prepared. Tens of thousands of Red soldiers are reported to have come into the east part of this province and they probably are hoping to move this way.

After Mukden fell the American Consulates sent letters to American citizens stating that conditions probably would continue to get worse and we should consider evacuation. The American navy provided ships for those who wanted to go to America or Shanghai and many missionaries went. In the American Board Mission, Alice Reed and Dr. Alma Cooke had been waiting for transportation for some time so they and Clara Hausske started for the States. Maude and Phyllis Hunter flew to America via Shanghai. Two of our families with small children, the Strongs and Whites, left by plane for Foochow just before Thanksgiving. Each family had a son born after "the first frost". On the plane with them went Dr. DeVargas of Yenching who hoped to go on to the Philippines for work in some American Board institution. The Blakneys also went to the Philippines, but they went on a boat.

#### WINTER FOR THE ROBINSONS.

Mary and I gave serious consideration as to whether we should go or not and decided not to go at present. We don't want to get caught behind the curtain, as the people in Tsinan and Shansi did, and we are willing to take a chance that we will be able to get to Peiping if fighting takes place here. We have sent a trunk and a suitcase to Peiping packed with things that we shall want if we go there. We also sent a trunk to be shipped to America. There is still quite a foreign community in Peiping and the belief is common that there will not be fighting there. While we don't consider Communist propaganda as dependable they are reported to have announced over the radio that there will not be fighting in Peiping. Gen. Fu Tso YU, who is in charge of this area at present, is also reported to have said that he will not fight to defend Peiping. We have engaged a room at the Galts and have had them lay in some supplies for us, if we have to go. If the Kuomintang sun does set in this area there may be a dark period before the Red sun gets high enough to give much light or heat. My fingers get cold as I write such sentences but how much is caused by imagination I do not know. Not only is Communist propaganda a poor barometer, the "Good weather reports" that come from Nanking are also equally untrustworthy. Neither do we have much faith in American newspapers, magazines and radio reports. How the "wise men" who posed as prophets before the November elections can expect anyone to bank much on their prognostications is more than we can figure out.

#### PILGRIMS' WINTER.

The idea of a Winter Number of the Chimes came to mind as I prepared a Thanksgiving service which we had here in T'unghsien. The Galts, Albert

Hauske, Laura Cross and our General Secretary, Mr. Wei Chen Yü, came down from Peiping, and with the eleven Americans who were still in T'unghsien we had a sizeable crowd for the service and dinner. The thought which I tried to emphasize at the eleven o'clock meeting was that the Pilgrims had celebrated the First Thanksgiving Day, not only after a harvest, as is usually stressed, but at the beginning of Winter, and a New England Winter at that. Having been through one, they knew what to expect, and yet they gave thanks. For a Scripture passage I read verses from Paul's letter to the Philippians, some of which might well be quoted in letters to those who make it possible for us to be here in China today. This "Thanksgiving letter" of Paul's was written in a Roman prison where he had been waiting trial two years and after the salutation the first note is that of thanks. All through the letter there is the note of joy and thanksgiving. It really is a good sedative for people who have had too large a dose of newspaper, radio and magazine information (?), (inflation?).

#### WINTER'S SUNSHINE.

The first paragraph of this letter doesn't give the whole picture. Winter in Vermont was wicked, all right, but it was also beautiful. Blue skies, white snow on evergreen trees, and billions of diamonds everywhere on the snow. Doesn't Emerson have an essay on Compensation somewhere? Certainly the winter sunshine compensated considerably for what the weatherman demanded of Vermonters. Maple sugar is a winter product, made when the cold freezing weather at night and the warm sunshine in the daytime meet in the right proportions.)

#### A FORMER WINTER IN CHINA.

Facing a Winter in China is not a new experience for us old-timers. Like the Pilgrim Fathers we have already survived one Winter - the period of Japanese occupation. In August, 1945, we thought that Winter had passed, and that the Peace of Summer was at hand. Schools returned from the west, missionaries came back to their stations, UNRRA, the US Navy and other organizations made available large quantities of rehabilitation materials, - seed for the new season. Alas, it turned out to be a cold, damp spring. Some of the fields where we had hoped to raise good crops were so covered with mud (Communists) that we couldn't even plough. Then there were fields where the blight of civil war destroyed the crops that had been planted, so that the only harvest was a hurricane.

Some good crops have been harvested and those of us who have been permitted to labor in this field feel that our labors have not been in vain. Let me give two illustrations of recent local crops. The North China Rural Christian Service Union is now conducting in T'unghsien a Winter Class for young farmers and their womanfolk. There are about thirty fine young people who are getting two months of training in methods of village life improvement which will help them to get through a Winter, and other seasons which will follow. Four of them are refugee women who made hooked rugs at our Drum Tower Church for several months. They have taken the first step towards church membership and are being prepared for baptism.

The second illustration of work that is going on here now is the relief work for refugees. Our T'unghsien Christian Union Relief Committee has just finished giving clothing and bedding to more than 1200 families who live in temples and other, make-shift, buildings. A few weeks ago I took some Luho students to one of those temples where we had a religious service for the refugees who live there. The students were so impressed with the conditions of the refugees that they decided to raise some relief funds for them. We borrowed a movie machine and some films from the USIS in Peiping, put on a benefit performance and raised a sizeable sum of money for relief. The Fu Yü girls joined

the Luho boys to organize a relief committee and they went on the streets collecting money from individuals, shops and organizations. With the funds received they have bought corn meal and will give it to the most needy families among the refugees. They have spent a lot of time investigating, printing tickets and buying corn meal. The Relief Committee is giving them some materials to sell and use the proceeds for buying food, and will give them socks to hand out with the grain tickets. This project is not only a benefit to the refugees, it has also been a valuable experience for the students. They have learned a lot about investigation and administration of charity, also some psychology of human nature. The spirit of the Luho students is decidedly better than it was last spring.

#### BLIZZARD APPROACHING?

While trying to get this letter ready for the postman I was asked to attend a meeting at the office of the local county magistrate (hsienchang) with representatives of our mission institutions and some other organizations. The purpose of the meeting was to inform us that the military authorities in Peiping have decreed that for defense purposes all trees will have to be cut, and buildings razed, in certain areas outside the T'unghsien city wall. This area includes a strip about 100 yards wide along the north end of our mission compound where our Luho Hospital, foreign residences and our girls school are located. We were told that the first decision was to raze all buildings, and cut all trees in our compound but the local authorities persuaded the military to leave the Luho buildings and trees. After the meeting, when a committee was formed to carry out those orders, the hsienchang and another official came to the compound to look over the situation. They are friendly and advised that we begin by cutting off the tops of the trees north of our residences, and see what the reaction of the military is to that.

The next day I went to Peiping and reported the matter to our mission secretary and to our treasurer. I also reported it to the American Consul who tried to get an appointment with somebody at Fu Tso Yü's headquarters. He didn't succeed but finally got an appointment for me to see the secretary of the provincial civil governor the next day. The Consul advised that we demand a written order from whomever is making the demand, and that a copy of the order be sent to the Consulate. The local committee decided to give two "tan" of corn for each room (chien) that is torn down. The Consul said that remuneration was a matter for both parties to discuss and agree upon. He also pointed out that if our buildings were torn down it would get into American newspapers and would give a bad impression of the National Government, just when Madame Chiang is there trying to get help for China. I dropped that hint with the governor's secretary and it may have had some effect. The hsienchang telephoned that there was to be another meeting of the committee which had been formed but later sent word that this second meeting was to discuss the tearing down of buildings which did not concern us, and it was therefore not necessary for us <sup>representatives</sup> of the mission to attend. The order not only concerns us but some thousand chien of Chinese buildings near the five city gates which are to be torn down. This was done in Paoingfu, and still the city was lost, which I pointed out to the secretary of the governor. Whatever comes of the order it is a good illustration of the efficiency (?) of the military strategists of the Chinese National Army in this area. The order also reveals the fact the the army is not so certain that they will be able to defeat the Communists out east of here as they have been trying to make us believe. We wait to see whether this weather report is announcing a gust of wind or a real blizzard.

#### WHAT IS WINTER NOW?

The heading for the first paragraph of this letter was purposely put in the past tense. It deals with a situation which existed half a century ago.

Present conditions are different, at least men have learned to control them so as to make them attractive, instead of repulsive. In a book entitled "Winter in Vermont" the author handles his subject so skilfully that the Green Mountain State seems like a very desirable place even for Winter residence, nor does he have to stretch the truth to do so. Many people live there in perfect comfort, and multitudes go there for Winter pleasure. Winter sports are one of the chief sources of income of the state at present. Snow trains and ski planes are crowded with such pleasure seekers. The snow which once blocked the roads is now ploughed out with powerful machines so that travelers can ride in heated cars all over God's creation. Houses are insulated and automatic oil heaters are not uncommon. Winter has changed from something to be dreaded and endured to a pleasant season to be anticipated and enjoyed.

What has this to do with the present situation in North China? We'll have to let the future answer that question, but at least Vermonters have discovered that what once seemed like a curse was not an unmitigated calamity. There were hidden resources which could be utilized for a better life. It is possible that people in China may discover that in the Winter weather which seems to be closing in around us there may be resources which can be used to gain advantages for those who live here. Great changes are most certainly needed and if conditions get bad enough it may be that some new group will come forth to establish a government worthy of help and support from other nations.

#### CHRISTMAS, A WINTER FESTIVAL.

In evaluating the credits and debits of Winter one should not overlook the fact that the Holiday Season comes in Winter. In fact it originated at a time, and in a country, when the political and psychological conditions were anything but summer-like. I shall not attempt to add any moral to this effusion. I have merely tried to weave a Christmas Greeting out of the thoughts that have been uppermost in my mind and heart. I want to give thanks to those of you who make it possible for us to be here. Most of all I want to express my appreciation for your friendliness and affection, which constitutes the Sunshine of our lives. So long as they continue, no rigors of Winter will be unbearable. We don't know how long we shall be able to stay here but we want you to know that we do not intend to take unnecessary risks.

One advantage of being so far from friends and dear ones at Christmas time is that the season is greatly lengthened. We have already received our first Christmas Greeting, and we expect they will continue to arrive for weeks to come. This first card came from my only remaining aunt and it has a picture of a Vermont village at Christmas time, with the church all decorated and sleighs and automobiles bringing people for the great event of the year. Aunt Viola wrote some time ago that she did not expect to be alive this Christmas. The doctor told her that if she would undergo an operation she had one chance in a hundred to live. "I took that chance," she has recently written, "and the good Lord helped me through." Now she hopes to live to see us again. We hope that we may see her again, and all the rest of you, when "the good Lord" sees fit to take us to you. In the meantime, may there be much Sunshine in your lives; and if clouds do come, may they at least be beautiful.

H.W. Robinson

#### POSTSCRIPT, M.S.R.

I now renounce the title Expectant Grandmother! On Thursday and Friday of this week we received radio messages announcing the birth of Carol Robinson, in Philadelphia, on November 28, and of Jennifer Mary Robinson, in Boston, on November 30. All parents doing well. Grandparents Happy! I must admit that if we should have to leave China, the bitterness of the blow and the sadness

of leaving our work and Chinese friends would be somewhat tempered by the hope of seeing our four grandchildren and their parents.

We have lived all fall in a state of indecision. Shall we leave China, while the going is good? If not, shall we go to Fukien where there is work, a welcome and peace? Or remain in North China? If we stay here, shall we make plans to go to Peiping if it becomes clear that there will be fighting around T'ungshien? How long can we stay before it becomes too late? How large a supply of food shall we keep on hand, in case we are caught here? How much shall we send to Peiping (with a possibility of looting there)? These questions are not affairs of state to be sure, but nevertheless, are real problems of everyday living.

In the meantime work goes on quite normally. On Saturday afternoon, our home is sometimes used for three meetings in a row. Rob has gone round in circles trying to keep up with committee meetings, distribution of relief, services at the city chapel and refugee temples, and all the other varied calls which come to a "senior missionary". I have carried a much heavier teaching schedule than last year, but because my classes are much larger, I have not been able to have so much personal contact with my students, and that I regret. It certainly has been worthwhile, from our point of view, to be here this fall, but for how long no one can tell. I don't know if this bit from a letter of a last year student is a true expression of Chinese opinion in regard to foreigners, but I am sure this is sincere.

"At such a crisis of our country for my teacher still in China, to taste together with us its sweets and bitterness, that I admired deeply and thank".

We have tentative plans for a Christmas celebration with our Yenching and Peiping American Board friends, but the date has not been set. Wherever we are and whatever we do, we shall be thinking of all of you with gratitude and affection, and wishing for you the old Christmas wish -

"GOD BLESS US EVERY ONE"

Rev. and Mrs. Robinson are missionaries of the North China Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, stationed in Tunghsien, where Mr. Robinson does evangelistic work with the Peiping-Tunghsien Association of the North China Kung Li Hui.

This letter was distributed December 14 by the Missions Council, 14 Beacon St., Boston 8, Mass. Notification of change of address should mention also the Robinsons' name.