

Chungking—Synonym for Courage

From time to time as scraps of information have come to the central office of the secretariat from Rotary clubs in China, that information has been relayed to Rotary clubs through the News Letter, and to the officers and committeemen of R.I. through the Secretary's letter. George Fitch, a Rotarian for twenty years, formerly a member of the Rotary Clubs of Shanghai and Nanking,

You may be surprised to see me, an American, standing before you as president of the Chungking club, and may ask: "Why isn't the president a Chinese?" Our clubs over there are all more or less international in their membership, and it has been the custom in most of them to alternate Chinese with foreign—American, British, or Dutch, or other nationals—as president . . .

Incidentally, life in Free China these days is not easy, nor does the Rotary club find it easy to maintain regular meetings. We know what it is to have to rush out from a meeting and take shelter in the caves that honeycomb Chungking. We have seen houses all about us collapse as if they had been made of pasteboard. We have had thousands and thousands killed or brutally maimed almost at our side, and sometimes it just hasn't been possible to hold a meeting for weeks and weeks on end.

There were months when the Japanese came over day and night. I remember one period when for eight days and nights we had hardly any sleep. To my mind it is amazing the way that comparatively small handful of Rotarians in Chungking have stuck by their guns. They are inspired by the principles, the ideals of Rotary, the Chinese and foreign group alike, and are determined that, though Rotary has for the time being been eclipsed in those great coastal cities of China—they can no longer function under Japanese rule—they are determined that Rotary shall not die in Free China . . .

Most of the buildings in Chungking have been destroyed. Many have been rebuilt today, of course, but one after another of the places where we held our luncheon meet-

ings, or "tiffin" as we call it there, were bombed out of existence, or so seriously damaged that they could not be used.

Sometimes we would meet in a Chinese restaurant and have a Chinese meal, only to find that the next week it was gone . . . Recently we have been fortunate in being able to have the main dining room of the new Victory Hotel. The room will seat only fifty people, the furnishings are of the most primitive type...

Finances are one of our greatest problems. The cost of living in Chungking, in all West China, has gone up from between sixty to seventy-fold—not sixty to seventy per cent but sixty to seventy-fold—six thousand to seven thousand per cent. And many of our members are finding it extremely difficult just to exist under those circumstances. Most government offices, the banks and some of the institutions, give living allowances. Of course, that helps their employees to ameliorate this difficulty but even a vice cabinet minister today receives so little in comparison with what it costs to live and support his family that he has to count the pennies, and when he has to pay out \$35 in national currency—which is only \$1.75 over here—for luncheon, and a pretty light luncheon at that, he has to think twice before doing it.

Of our members, a few are in educational or mission work and they are the most seriously affected. And yet these men do so feel the importance of carrying on that many of them, practically all of them, are making great sacrifices in order to attend those meetings regularly . . .

You can easily imagine life in a city like Chungking, with refugees

China, and in 1942-43, president of the Rotary Club of Chungking, represented the Rotary Club of Chungking at the St. Louis convention. He attended the club presidents' assembly and, at the invitation of the chairman, described how the Rotary Club of Chungking is carrying on. Here are some excerpts from his talk:

coming from the East, forced out as they have been by the millions by the Japanese. Between forty and fifty million Chinese have been forced from their homes to wander, most of them they know not where. Among these are many of the very finest type of people, university professors, professional men, governmental officials, and others.

We have thousands of "warphans" as they call them, children who have been made orphans by this war, and over five million Chinese soldiers have been killed in this terrible war. We have our air raid victims. One of the most serious disasters occurred during eighteen hours of continuous alert, when people were not allowed to leave the shelters, these underground caverns dug by human hands out of the rock. The air naturally gets bad, stifling, people become sick, panic strikes into their hearts as the bombs fall directly overhead, and disaster occurs. Such a disaster occurred only a little over a year ago when more than two thousand people were trampled to death in a panic which ensued. So our problem in that regard is in gaining enough funds to be of assistance, and I wish at this time to thank those clubs here in America which have remembered us and sent funds to the Rotary Club of Chungking for distribution for these worthy enterprises . . .

In spite of these things that we face out there, Rotary in China still carries on and is planning for expansion. A new club will shortly be opened in that great city halfway between Hongkong and Chungking known as Kweilin, the halfway stop on the old air route. And we are looking to establish clubs in other parts of that country.

