“Here was the fulfillment of my life’s dream,” wrote Sister Mary Mark Mullen in 1946 as she reflected on her arrival as a missionary in China in 1933. “After all the months of weary, dangerous travel, taking me halfway around the world, I knew that I had really come home, in the deepest sense of the word.” Between 1926 and 1948, a total of sixteen Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden served as missionaries in China, with Sister Mary Mark Mullen serving the longest, for a total of 14 years. In ministering there, the sisters were part of a missionary effort dating back to the middle of the nineteenth-century.

America Sends Missionaries to China

With the advent of the Treaty of Tianjin of 1856, religious liberty was guaranteed for Christians in China, including the interior. This treaty not only allowed Catholic missionaries to preach in the interior but also protected the Chinese converts. The result was that “multiple missionary orders returned to China, and the Vatican began organizing ecclesiastical territories under the orders’ jurisdiction.” Among these early Catholic missionaries were the Spanish Augustinians, who entered Hunan, China, in 1879. Because of the fatalities in Europe during World War I, there was a decline in numbers of European missionaries, resulting in the Catholic Church’s inclusion of America to help in this ministry. Providentially, in 1908, America was no longer considered to be a “missionary territory;” with this change of status, the Catholic Church in America was poised to provide missionaries to China. Even before the end of the war, Catholics in America were acknowledging that “due to the nature of war-time phenomena, these are the premises which are leading our American Catholics to the genuine conclusion and hearty realization that their dutiful attitude toward missionary enterprises must be one of hearty activity and cooperation.”

In 1919, Pope Benedict XV issued *Maximus Illud*, an Apostolic Letter calling for the revival of missionary work, and this furthered the missionary spirit in America. On the heels of this papal decree, the St. Paul of the Cross Province of the Passionist order of priests voted at their 1920 General Chapter to accept the mission in Hunan, China. And in 1921, thirteen young priests left the United States to take over the missions in Hunan from the Spanish Augustinians. Upon reaching China and receiving their assignments, these priests settled into their work by learning the language and working with the people. Facing many challenges, the young priests arrived in Hunan, a section of China that was still plagued by warlords and banditry. In addition, the work was made more difficult as there was a widespread famine, resulting in many orphans. In 1922, Father Raphael Vance alone reported taking in more than a hundred abandoned babies in his first three months as a missionary in the town of Chenki.

Realizing that there was a need for further assistance, the Passionists turned to women religious to help fill the needs. With the Passionists having houses in both Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Convent Station, New Jersey, the Passionists naturally turned to women religious in those dioceses. For the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the religious congregation that responded was the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden and the China Mission

In March 1924, Very Reverend Father Stanislaus Grennan, the Passionist Provincial, approached several communities of women religious, including the Sisters of St. Joseph. In his appeal, he stated that “there is a most urgent need for Sisters, to care for the orphans and the sick, and to teach the children,” turning first to “our own friends.” In his letter to Mother Bonaventure Callaghan, Mother Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph, he asked that the community consider sending four to five sisters to China as missionaries.

Acting upon this appeal, Mother Bonaventure in turn distributed a ballot to the professed sisters, asking for approval to agree to this new mission, stating that there would be “blessings” from “answering the call.” Additionally, “Father Stanislaus says God will reward us a hundredfold in vocations for what we sacrifice for the sake of the poor pagans.” Vocalizing her own perspective within the text of the ballot, she stressed the relationship between the two religious orders:

Personally, I [Mother Bonaventure] think we should make an effort to help the Passionists in their work. Gratitude for their goodness to our Community should prompt us to do so even were there no higher motives. For the past Twenty Years they have been untiring in their kindness.
to our Hospital and at the present time we are depending on them for daily Mass there. The Sisters who have lived there and worked there could recount untold sacrifices which the Fathers have made for us – the Community should not forget this when an opportunity has arisen to show appreciation.⁹

Only sisters who were professed twenty years or longer were eligible to vote; the resulting vote was 74 sisters in favor, 1 sister against, and two sisters not voting.¹⁰

In 1926, the first four Sisters of St. Joseph set out for China, eventually finding their way to their mission in the city of Chihkiang.¹¹ The goal was to have the sisters staff an orphanage, teach school, run the catechumenate, provide a preparatory school, and work at a dispensary. Facing periods of unrest as well as anti-foreign sentiments, the sisters dealt with “Reds,” bandits, and war lords, all of which were often undistinguishable.¹² In 1927, missionaries across China were forced to evacuate the interior and it was during this exile that Sister Clarissa Stattmiller, one of the Sisters of St. Joseph, succumbed to malaria. Over the following years, more sisters arrived in China while others left, generally because of health issues. In 1930, the city of Chihkiang experienced a siege that lasted slightly over two weeks – a forewarning of what the future held.

Sister Mary Mark Mullen Goes to China

By January 1932, Monsignor Cuthbert O’Gara, who was vicar apostolic in China at the time and later became bishop, asked for two more sisters. One year later, in February 1933, the chosen two, Sisters Mary Mark Mullen and Rosario Goss, set out for their new lives in China. They arrived in Chihkiang in April 1933, bringing the total to six Sisters of St. Joseph on mission in China at that time. On June 29, 1933, a 58-day siege of the city began and the two newly arrived sisters were immediately thrust into the ravages of warfare.

With a siege to welcome her, it is a wonder that out of all of the Baden missionary Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Mary Mark would serve the greatest number of years in China. As shown by her entrance to the Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Mary Mark Mullen proved to veer slightly from the path of a traditional sister. Born as Marie Mullen in 1892 she was the oldest of 11 children. One of her younger sisters entered the congregation in September 1923 at the age of eighteen. While that sister, Sister Germaine, was the typical age for entrance, Sister Mary Mark entered the following January at the age of 32, which at the time was an age that required a special dispensation.¹³ Within a few months of her entrance, Sister Mary Mark would have been living at the motherhouse at the time of the community’s ballot approving missionary work in China.

In 1930, Sister Mary Mark professed her final vows and soon after, she submitted her request to become a missionary in China. After spending her initial years as a teacher, Sister Mary Mark’s request was granted in 1932 when she was selected for the China mission. In preparation for this new work, she was enrolled in a special six-month missionary medical course at St. Joseph’s Hospital.¹⁴ Upon completion of the course, she set off for China in February 1933; she would have been 40 years old at the time. From 1933 through 1944, she ministered to the orphans, the sick, and the elderly in Chihkiang. During that period, she experienced the unrest of the years of banditry and a civil war, followed by the Second Sino-Japanese War/World War II. She also was present for the modernization of Chihkiang.

Through it all, she maintained her sense of humor, which was considered important in a missionary.¹⁵ The Chinese gave Sister Mary Mark the title of “Slowly, or after a while, Sister” because “she so often used this expression and partly because she was accustomed to act with deliberation. Short, thin, wiry, calm, quiet. Was Superior for last six of her twelve years in China. Took charge of the orphans. Prepared trousseaus for marriageable girls.”¹⁶ She was a woman with a missionary spirit.

Beacon in the Dark

In the fall of 1944, all foreigners were ordered to evacuate due to the conditions from the Second Sino-Japanese War and with that, Sisters Mary Mark and Rosario started their journey home, setting out in November and ending in Baden the following August. Soon after her return, Sister Mary Mark was determined to write an
account of the China mission, resulting in the manuscript Beacon in the Dark. Within this work, she wove together many of the sisters’ stories from the 1933 through 1944 missionary period as well as her circuitous nine-month exodus from China. In the credit pages for the book, she references Sister Rosario Goss as providing “invaluable help in the compilation of this book” and she dedicated the work to the memory of “Sister Mary Clarissa Stadmiller [sic], the first Sister of Saint Joseph to give her life for China.”

Sister Mary Mark’s biological sister, Esther Mullen, was involved with the initial attempt to publish the work in 1947. In March, Esther submitted the manuscript to The Society of Propagation of the Faith for consideration of publication. In August of that year, the Mother Superior, Mother Emerentia Snyder, provided Esther with a copy of Bishop Hugh C. Boyle’s imprimatur for the book; Mother Emerentia wrote “I trust it is all that is necessary for you to go ahead with your plans.” However, the book was never published; according to a 1997 document compiled by then-Archivist Sister Helen Marie Shrift, the reason for this initial non-publication stemmed from miscommunication:

Esther Mullen said the publisher broke his agreement to print after he called MGA and asked the number of Sisters we had. An unidentified person told him we were a small Community; thirty Sisters were here at MGA [Mount Gal-litzin Academy]. He did not feel we could sell a run of 1,000 books…. The arrangement was never restructured. At the time we [Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden] had many grade and high schools, and were about 500 members.

The time has finally come to publish Sister Mary Mark’s work. Her account appears to rely not only on her own memories but also on correspondence from the sisters in China to the United States, along with accounts written by Sister Rosario Goss and Mother Genevieve Ryan. At times, her story places events out of order, perhaps to tell a more convincing story.

Chapter 1: The Request

Mother, I want to go to China.22

There! It was said. Not as I had meant to say it, for the speech I had rehearsed in my mind so many times was something quite different from the bald statement I had just blurted out. I had meant to tell Mother Superior how, ever since I entered the novitiate, it had been my hope to work in the mission in China; how, ever since I first heard of China’s millions of pagan souls, there had been a burning desire in me to be an instrument through which the knowledge and love of God could be brought to their unenlightened souls. Day after day, as I went about my tasks in the novitiate, the desire grew stronger and stronger. It was a thrilling thought, this hope of mine that I might help to bring the light of God’s love to pierce the dusk of their unawakened minds. I had waited so long – five years – for this moment. All this was what I really meant to say to Mother, but my eagerness and timidity had made me abrupt.

As I waited for Mother to speak, my mouth felt dry with fear that I had ruined everything. The palms of my hands became moist with nervousness. Mother stepped back, out of the glare of the sun, into the doorway of the chapel and looked down at me with shrewd appraisal. Surprise twinkled for a moment in the blue eyes of the kindly old nun.

“Do you, Sister?” Her smile was encouraging. “Well now……” I held my breath as I waited for her to go on. “Well now,” she repeated, “Have you spoken to your family about this? Don’t you think you had better tell them first, Sister?”

“Yes, Mother, I will mention it to them. I’ll tell them today,” I promised, “but, please Mother, will you keep me in mind when it is time to send the next mission band to China?”

“We’ll see, Sister,” she nodded sagely, “we’ll see. Meanwhile, pray that I may be guided in the decision you have asked me to make.” Her long thin hand waved away my thanks. “Enjoy your visit with your family now, Sister.”

I watched her erect figure as she turned back into the dim chapel where the fragrance of incense still lingered from our profession ceremony, for that morning, I had knelt at the altar rail, with five other novices, to pronounce my final vows as a Sister of Saint Joseph.

Tears pricked my eyes as I started through the rose garden to the orchard where my family waited for me. How was I to tell them? What could I say to ease this new pain I was bringing to their hearts? What would they think? Mother was not well…China so far…would I ever see her again…? This was so hard to do! And the others; my father, my sisters, the boys. Just at the entrance to the orchard I faltered. I couldn’t tell them! I just couldn’t! But I must. I had to!

Mother and Dad sat on a weather-beaten bench under an old elm tree, beaming proudly, as I approached. My brothers, lolling on the grass, rose lazily and grinned. I tried hard to swallow a sudden lump in my throat. I was the eldest of all these children; eleven of us. My girlhood had been filled to the brim, helping Mother care for my seven boisterous brothers and three sisters. I had taught them their prayers while Mother was busy with the baby. Cut fingers and bruised knees were brought to me for attention. Many a spanking they got from me too, when occasion demanded. There was a strong bond of affection among us.

Even so, I was totally unprepared for the reaction of all my brothers and sisters, now grown to maturity, when at length I told them I wanted to go to China as a missionary. The boys especially, waxed eloquent in their protestations.

“Ah, why do you want to go so far away? Isn’t there enough to keep you busy here near home?” exclaimed Gregory, with an angry toss of the tousled blond hair I had combed so often.
Regis lifted a supercilious eyebrow as he asked me scornfully, “What’s the use in bothering with those old Chinks?”

Joe’s steady blue eyes twinkled mischievously as he offered, “I’ll even let you work on me, Sister Mark. That should give you all the missionary work you could want.”

“Gee whiz, Sister Mark… China is so far away…and it is so big…and you…well, you’re such a little half-pint…” This came stumblingly from Byron as he kicked angrily at a clump of grass.

Clair protested, “Gosh, you don’t have to go right away, do you, Sister Mark? Can’t you stay here for a couple of years, anyway?”

I could only smile and try to embrace them all at once. With brimming eyes, I looked to Mother and Dad for help in staving off this bombardment of protests.

“I know, boys, Sister Mark must make her own decisions. Stop plaguing her!” said Dad, as he patted Mother’s plump shoulder comfortingly.

Mother lifted her quivering chin proudly and said through trembling lips, “It must be as God wills…if Sister Mark is called to China, we should feel it an even greater honor than this today. This is no time to be thinking of ourselves.”

I tried to placate the boys. “That’s right, Clair. I may not be going very soon after all. It may be several years before another mission band goes out to China.”

And it was, in fact, three years, one month and two days from that memorable day in the garden at Mount Gallitzin, Baden, Pennsylvania, before I was to realize my ambition. Years of days filled with a round of duties that were a pleasure. I taught school, did dispensary work, and learned practical nursing at Saint Joseph’s Hospital in Pittsburgh.

On the sixth of January 1933, Mother Superior came to the hospital to tell me the long-awaited news. I was to leave for China on February tenth, together with Sister Rosario Goss of Twin Rocks, Pennsylvania.

Physical examinations were taken and passed, passports acquired, trunks packed and farewell visits made. Goodbyes were said to all the Sisters at Baden with a dispatch that left no time for tears.

Four days and nights on a westward-bound train brought us to San Francisco, where our party was augmented by six Sisters of Charity from Convent Station, New Jersey. Then at four o’clock on the afternoon of February tenth, we boarded the S.S. President Grant.

Walking up the gangplank, I was gripped by a sudden fear. Was I equal to the hardships I had heard the other Sisters describe in their letters? Could I do for these people all that I wanted? How long would I be permitted to work there? Would I ever see my family again? Resolutely I placed all my doubts in God’s hands and stepped on board.

I was on my way to China where, it proved, I was to spend the next twelve years of my life; momentous years for China, since they were to bring her to the forefront in world affairs; thrilling years for me, for I could in no way anticipate the events they would contain. As my brother Joe said afterward, “Wouldn’t you know, of all of us, it would be the quiet little nun, who would find the most excitement and adventure.”
En route from America to China, the sisters made a brief stop in Kobe, Japan. Sisters Mary Mark Mullen and Rosario Goss, along with six Sisters of Charity, ride in “native taxis.”

CHAPTER 2: CHINA BOUND

I stood with Sister Rosario at the ship’s rail until the thin line of the California coast disappeared in the gathering twilight. Sister’s tall figure seemed rigid. Mixed emotions flitted across her pale face as her blue eyes clung to the empty horizon. Not a word passed between us.

Love of home was very strong in our hearts. Stronger still was the love of God’s little ones to whom we had dedicated our minds and hearts. In the Province of Hunan, thousands of miles from the great city of Shanghai, we were to minister to the hungry, the naked, the sick and the dying, ever in quest of souls on a forgotten byway of the world.

From the murky darkness enveloping the ship, we turned with one accord to the stairway leading to our lighted cabin. In it there were flowers of every description! Candy, books and stacks of mail nearly filled the table in the center of the cabin. One thoughtful Sister at Mount Gallitzin had prepared a special farewell message: a letter for each day of the entire voyage, highlighting the Saint of the day.

The trip across the Pacific was torture to me; I was seasick from the time I left San Francisco until the ship anchored at Honolulu. With genuine relief, I welcomed the one day stopover on this beautiful island, with its liquid sunshine and lush tropical growth. After a visit with the Maryknoll Sisters on the island, we returned to the ship and I squared my shoulders for another bout with mal de mer. The two weeks it took to reach Yokahma, Japan, seemed like an eternity to me.

We first set foot on Japanese soil at Kobe, where we spent only a few hours. On landing, we were immediately surrounded by bustling, comical little Japa-
more than a thousand miles into the interior, so we bade goodbye to our new friends and prepared for the next lap of our journey up the Yangtze River.

A small Chinese river steamer – none too clean – was our home for the next three days and nights on the way to Hankow. I sat on deck as the little boat edged its way through the motley array of river craft wedged against the shore: sampans with bamboo sails shining in the sun, tiny paddle steamers, heavy cumbersome river junks.

The deafening roar of the city subsided as our little steamer chugged its way through the swift-running water. Many rafts passed us, some of the larger ones consisting of hundreds of logs bound together. Along the shore the scenery was breathtakingly beautiful. Seen through the mist, gaunt rocks assumed fantastic shapes; here a great crouching lion, there a huge sleeping dragon. High up on a cliff, a white pagoda caught the slanting rays of the sun. The delicate tracery of trees on the mountains in the distance seemed painted on an endless sheet of blue silk. We passed many villages huddled along the shore and field after field of rice where here and there a solitary peasant stood knee deep in muddy water, tending the growing plants.

Early on Sunday morning we reached Hankow. After hearing Mass in the French church in the Foreign Concession, we visited the Passionist Procurate, which is the business office of Catholic Missionaries in Hunan, then went to the Catholic Mission Hospital where we lodged for our stay in Hankow. The hospital was a very large and well-established one, operated by the Canossian Sisters from Italy.

We spent three weeks in Hankow preparing for the trip into the interior. Father William Westoven, C.P., a veteran missionary who had been assigned to Chihkiang, was to be our guide and protector. This part of the journey would be made by sampan and everything needed to sustain life would have to be taken along - bedding, food, even cooking utensils. Still we found time to see a little of the city.

Hankow is a busy and crowded city where the stream of life moves on with characteristic Oriental cacophony. The narrow shop-lined streets were enlivened with peddlers, beggars, junk-men and scampering children. Along the cobblestone streets, old women teetered cautiously on fragile bound feet. A coolie jogged his way expertly through the traffic, two dripping water buckets swinging from a shoulder pole. The sing-song cry of the hawkers rose and fell in endless entreaty.

One afternoon we went to visit a Catholic mission across the river from Hankow. Sister Electa, one of the Sisters of Charity who had been in China for some years, went with us. The tall figures of Sister Electa and Sister Rosario dwarfed me as we sought rickshas for the ride form the riverbank to the mission. As is customary in China, Sister Electa bargained with the coolie regarding the price of the trip and we climbed up over the high shafts and set out. When we reached our destination, the coolie demanded more money than had been agreed upon. Sister Electa argue stoutly with him, accusing him of taking unfair advantage of foreigners. To which the perspiring coolie replied, “It is not that, but just look at the length of your two!” We could not help laughing as we paid the difference the elongated frames of my two companions required.

Another day, Sister Rosario and I decided to seek out the post-office to mail some letters home. Unable to read Chinese, we walked and walked without finding it. At last, we decided to ask directions from a traffic policeman standing at an intersection. He could not help us since he spoke no English. Returning to the hospital we learned that the post office was just a short distance away. Then and there, we learned to read and speak our first word in Chinese – post office.

Preparations were at last completed for the trip upriver by sampan to Juanling. Our trunks and bags were packed into one compartment of the little boat. In the other compartment, our bedding was placed on the floor under a low bamboo matting that served as a roof. We had to crawl in on top of the bedding and travel in either a sitting or reclining position. On a sampan, seldom is the roof high enough to permit one to stand upright.

We started at dawn. In the early morning light, the river looked fantastic, like a great silvery ribbon threading its way through long fingers of fog. The cold spring air chilled me to the bone.
I could hear sounds ashore but they seemed to come from a great distance, muffled by the remote gray blanket of fog. It was eerie!

As the sun came up, I could distinguish the figure of the Chinese boatman as he stood on the high-riding stern of our sampan. In sections where the river is shallow, boatmen punt their way upstream with long bamboo poles, all the while calling to the winds in raucous falsetto voices, urging them to fill the sails. The punters need help badly, for the angry water swirls over large boulders and huge tooth-like rocks, in a whirlpool.

It is of course even more dangerous travelling at night. So, at the end of each day, we made a stop at some little village where we spent the night, sometimes at a Catholic mission, if there happened to be one in the village, otherwise we stayed on the sampan.

After ten days we reached Juangling, the Passionist Prefecture of Northwest Hunan. Here we stopped long enough for a short visit with our genial Bishop Cuthbert O’Gara, C.P. It was to Bishop O’Gara’s courage and resourcefulness, no less than to his solicitude that we owed our safety and comfort in the difficult years we were to face.

The Sisters of Charity from Convent Station, New Jersey, who had been our travelling companions from the time we left San Francisco, had reached their destination upon arrival in Juangling. So when goodbyes were said, we pushed on with Father William, for we were eager to reach our new home in China.

Only a very small sampan could be acquired for the remainder of our trip so after the food was stored aboard, we discovered that there was little room for ourselves. We had to crawl into our tiny compartment on hands and knees and through the whole journey we were forced to sit with knees drawn up. It was impossible to get up and walk around the boat. Travelling in such a manner is really a penance and we considered it a fitting way to spend Lent.

Furthermore, just outside the opening of our small compartment, an obliging Chinese boatman cooked food for all on a little open wood-burning stove. Thus we had smoke and cinders blowing into our faces to add to our discomfort.

Our next stop was at Chenki, two days later. At the small mission there, Father Jeremiah had his cook prepare a meal for us. While we ate, the kindly priest played some music for us on his Victrola. Ironically enough, the first record he selected was Hungry Women.

Early the following morning we were again on our little boat. Father William had hired pullers to help get the boat upstream. A long bamboo rope was thrown ashore where eight or ten pullers fastened it around their shoulders and waists.

They walked along the shore pulling the boat in happy-go-lucky fashion, their bodies bent forward, dangling arms swinging and their feet keeping time to their own curious chant. Such a chant may be heard anywhere in China: the sedan chair carriers, as they jog along miles of narrow mountain roads; workmen carrying heavy loads of lumber, stone, paper, cloth, cotton or rice. All work to the tune of a ditty, carrying the heaviest loads imaginable. Sometimes the song had a very happy air; at other times it was very solemn and plaintive.

Often enough the coolies had to pull the boat over dangerous rapids where large rocks lurked beneath the surface of the water, ready to smash the little craft to pieces. At times the current was so swift and the waters so unruly, our pullers were forced to lie flat on the ground, holding fast to the rope.

It was hard work, but so long as the coolie was sure of his bowl of rice at the end of the day, he was happy and would chant his way up any river. One coolie improvises in a sing-song fashion, and the chant goes like this: “This is very heavy.” The others answer, “Well, we know it. Well, we know it.” The chanter continues. “But today is payday.” The others respond, “Well, we know it. Well, we know it.” And so for hours at a time, day after day, they sang in this fashion about many things: the sun, the moon and stars, games of war, of their families and friends, of love, of themselves. After Father explained this to us, I never tired of listening.

One bright moonlight night, Father William promised the boatman more money if they would push on a little faster. It was agreed. About an hour later, we sat huddled under the bamboo roof saying our night prayers. A lot of commotion and loud yelling in Chinese diverted attention from our Aves. We could see the short stocky figure of Father William hurrying to the front of the boat. He was shouting instructions to the coolies in fluent Chinese.

We could do nothing but wait in bewilderment and redouble our prayers until Father William came in later to ask us if we realized what had been happening. “We hadn’t the least idea what all the commotion was about, Father. We were saying our night prayers,” I told him. “I was saying some prayers too, Sister, but they weren’t my night prayers,” Father’s deep voice boomed. “Going around that deep bend back there, the pullers’ rope broke. We almost lost the entire distance we covered today,” he growled, mopping his perspiring face with his coat sleeve. With the help
of the coolies, Father had succeeded in getting the boat poled close to shore, where the broken rope was mended. We started the weary trek once again.

Father had suspected the pullers were bandits and had broken the rope purposely, intending to wait and come back later to rob us. This veteran missionary had had many narrow escapes from bandits. He knew that no one is safe travelling on Chinese rivers.

Days later, our river traffic came to an end. We left the sampan without regret. It was good to get out and stretch our legs after sitting on them for so many days. From here on, we were to travel by sedan chair. The chairs and carriers had been sent out from the mission in Chihkiang the day before. With them came a Chinese Christian who knew the carriers and the road to our new home.

Each chair was carried by four men. Faded, ill-fitting jackets hung limply on their spare shoulders and loose trousers of the same material, which looked as though it had once been blue, reached the calves of their wiry legs. Their bare feet were thrust into woven sandals and they wore large conical hats to protect them from the sun or rain.

After an early breakfast, we started single file, through the wild rugged, desolate country. The carriers moved along with a trotting motion which flung me from side to side in my chair. The fierce Hunan winds drove across bleak rice paddies and broke against the mountains that seemed to meet over our heads. Here and there, the mountain passes narrowed to a mere strip of rocky ledge, skirting a sheer precipice. I could hear below me the deep-throated roar of the river. The ragged branches of trees sagged outwards, overhanging the narrow path. To add to the hazards, it began to rain, the road becoming a slippery morass of thick red mud. More than once during the day, a slip by one of the coolies nearly sent me and my chair tumbling into the gorge.

Every few hours the coolies stopped to rest. They prepared something for us to eat and smoked a pipe full of opium themselves. After their smoke, they shouldered their burdens and jogged along with renewed vigor. About three o’clock in the afternoon from the top of the last of the mountains, Chihkiang could be seen in the distant valley. The rain had stopped and sunlight streamed through a gap in the low over-hanging clouds, as though a huge spotlight had been turned on the peaceful-looking walled city, for our arrival. We stopped for a short time before beginning the descent.

As I looked down the mountain, it seemed impossible to believe that there was any life in the little isolated valley. The Juan River flowing slowly along on the West side of the city was the only thing I could see moving.

The pride of Chihkiang is the two-storied, covered stone bridge which spans the river. Every venerable citizen and every chattering urchin can tell you with vivid detail, how six centuries ago, a wealthy stranger built the bridge, in fulfillment of a Mandarin’s dream. On the hills and mountains surrounding the city are ageless pagodas, masterpieces of Chinese architecture. Atop a mountain facing the East gate, I saw a convent of Buddhist nuns. History tells us that the high wall about Chihkiang is over a thousand years old. A heavy fortress-like gate on each of the four sides is locked and guarded by two soldiers at night. Inside the walls and dotting the streets can be seen the roofs of many pagan temples.

Shortly before five o’clock, we reached the foot of the mountain still a mile out from the city. I could see in the distance a crowd of Chinese boys. They were racing toward our chairs, pointing and shouting to the priest who was with them. As they neared us they threw lighted firecrackers into the air and along the path of our chairs. For a few minutes the sound of exploding firecrackers made me wonder if this were some Chinese Fourth of July. But Father Edward McCarthy, C.P., who had come with the boys to welcome us, laughingly explained that this demonstration was China’s custom of welcome.

Just outside the city wall a group of the orphan girls from the mission and Mother Genevieve with Sisters Christina, Saint Anne, and Magdalena, waited to welcome to our new home. These sisters had come to China almost eight years before and the joy that was reflected in their faces at our safe arrival was mirrored in my own heart at the sight of them.

I left the crippling confines of my chair with more speed than

*During the warlord period, the internal strife throughout the lands prevented any attempts of cessation of poppy growing. Opium use was common and the Passionist priests often wrote about it.*
decorum, forgetting my weariness in my eagerness to reach their outstretched arms. As we walked to the mission, through the narrow unpaved streets, worn smooth by thousands of sandaled feet, children playing before the crude bamboo thatched hovels stopped to stare at the new arrivals. In the open doorway of a hut an old woman stood, her yellow leathery face creased in a wrinkled toothless grin as she bowed to the passing procession.

At the gateway of the wall surrounding the mission compound, all the Christians of Chihkiang and the mission personnel greeted us with another round of ear-shattering firecrackers. They all talked at once, a strange unintelligible babble we recognized as words of welcome only from their beaming faces and courteous bows as they accompanied us through the courtyard.

Slowly the clamour lessened as we neared the church. It was Holy Thursday and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. In years after, when we arranged the Repository, this first glimpse of the church in Chihkiang always came vividly back to mind. Rows of wooden benches and kneelers flanked the aisle leading to the altar rail. The round poles supporting the sloping roof were painted Chinese red and decorated with Chinese characters. On the tiny altar, vases filled with paper flowers stood between tall candlesticks. The reflected light from the candles fell upon an oil painting of Saint Paul of the Cross, hanging over the tabernacle.

As I knelt in the dimly lighted church, there welled up in my heart prayers of fervent thanksgiving to Divine Providence who had brought us safely over the ten thousand mile journey and I asked for the necessary grace to carry out the work I had come to do.

Chapter 3: Chihkiang

Chihkiang is a city with a population of about 100,000. Here any Chinese who owns his own home and has a regular job is considered wealthy. Like anywhere else in the world, the wealthy are in the minority so this class of Chinese comprises about ten per cent of the population.

The middle class in Chihkiang are the working people, those who drudge ceaselessly at anything that offers in order to eke out some kind of an existence. Often their very lives depend on their ingenuity in finding some pitiful job which will provide rice for the family while allowing them to "keep face" in the community. And keeping face is just as important to the Chinese as what Mrs. Jones will think of her next door neighbor in Canton, Ohio. So they struggle and grub, day after day, these Chihkianians who make up forty per cent of the city’s inhabitants.

But there is still the other half, the poor of Chihkiang, and their poverty is such that it taxes the imagination of any American to conceive. The poorest of the poor in America, would by Chinese standards, be considered well off in our district of China. No amount of effort, no sacrifice however great, could be too much to give for these poor people. They had so little and they needed so very much. Certainly, they were enough to kindle any missionary’s zeal. The mission here at Chihkiang had been operating about twelve years when we arrived. The Province of Hunan being the last to open its doors to Christianity, admitted the Spanish Augustinian Fathers in 1918. Three years later, in May 1921, one of these missionaries, Father Hypolytto, came at length to Chihkiang.

What a strange figure he must have seemed to the then hostile inhabitants, in his dusty cassock, his shaggy black beard and white determined face. Undaunted by the grudging acceptance of this despised “foreigner,” Father Hypolytto looked around the town and found an old abandoned shack. In it he lived, celebrated Mass and preached to any who were willing to listen. Daily, for eighteen months, his discourses continued from the door of his tiny hut, and little by little, his congregation grew until it taxed the capacity of his makeshift church. In 1922, he was joined by Father Timothy McDermott, C.P., who had been sent by the Passionist Order to fit himself for the arduous work of the missionary in China.

The same year that Father Timothy arrived in Chihkiang was one of famine and cholera. The dead and dying lay side by side along the country lanes and hundreds of babies were orphaned by these twin scourges. The scenes the priests witnessed were shocking, not only to the new arrival but also to the veteran Father Hypolytte. They tended and fed the sick and the dying; they gathered the orphaned babies from along the roadside, baptizing those who were beyond help. With hundreds of these babies to care for, it was necessary to build an orphanage. Sisters were needed to care for the poor little ones, so a call for volunteers reached the Saint Joseph Order in Baden, Pennsylvania, in the spring of 1924. From among the many Sisters who volunteered their help, four were finally chosen: Sisters Florence Sullivan, Sister Christina Werth, Sister Saint Anne Callahan, and Sister Clarissa Stadtmiller.

Thinking of the hardships endured, the labor involved, the
Beacon in the Dark – (continued)

Travel in China was challenging at times. Sacrifices made by this original band of sturdy souls who had no previous knowledge of either the language or the customs of the Chinese, and no missionary experience, I marveled that so much progress had been made in a decade of years. Now there was an orphanage for boys as well as girls, a school for boys and one for girls, a home for the aged, a hospital, and a catechumenate for men and women who wished to study Catholic doctrine with the intention of becoming Christians. Thus far, the mission had harvested six hundred pagan souls into the Catholic faith.

Mother Genevieve, our Superior, who had been nicknamed by the Chinese the “Old Sister” – a title of respect and reverence – had a natural genius for homemaking, and our mission convent reflected in a thousand different ways this wonderful woman’s desire to make a home for the Sisters. Besides training a Chinese woman to prepare food in American style, she baked bread, made soap, and mended the priest’s clothes and those of the orphan boys. All this was done in addition to the usual running of a house. And no small detail in making a home was overlooked by Mother. We even had sash curtains on our windows. It was delightful to find things almost the same as in our convent in America. True, we did not have electricity, gas or running water, but there was order, shining cleanliness and regular observance of Community life.

How well I remember that first breakfast in the convent at Chihkiang! Sister Rosario and I were almost too excited to eat. A couple of times during the meal, I caught an understanding smile on Mother Genevieve’s round kind face and directly after breakfast she said, “Well, Sisters, would you like to see our compound?”

“Oh yes, Mother!” we answered in unison.

Mother’s stout body shook with good-natured laughter. “Sister Mark thought this moment would never come, didn’t you, Sister?” she teased. “Come along then,” she invited, moving toward the door with a quick vigorous step which belied her seventy years. At the door, she stopped long enough to pick up her crocheting. Her every free moment was spent making warm caps for the orphans, ripping out and enlarging them as the owners’ head grew. With her crocheting tucked under her arm, Mother opened the door and we stepped out into a sunlit courtyard.

I looked around the compound, seeing first the little white smoothly-plastered church built in Spanish mission style. Then I saw all the other buildings grouped closely around the church. They were of assorted sizes, some of them merely rude shacks, these buildings which were to become so dearly familiar as the years went along. As we walked, Mother Genevieve was busily crocheting; I don’t think she even lost a stitch as she escorted us around the compound, naming each building as we came to it. Here was the boy’s school, there the priests’ quarters, to the right the hospital and the home for the aged. Then there was the catechumenates and over yonder, the girls’ school. They looked so cozy to me, close and neat there in the mission compound. And the great wall surrounding the whole, gave the place an air of security and stability.

Here was the fulfillment of my life’s dream. Here, thousands of miles from my home and family, I unpacked my trunk and did the hundred and one little jobs necessary to getting settled in this new mission. Those first days in a strange land, among a foreign people whose language I still had to learn, brought me a quiet but deep sense of happiness. There was an odd inexplicable feeling of belonging that amused me. At times, I had the bewildering consciousness of having been there before. How and why this should be, there was no possible way of knowing and I didn’t even try to puzzle it out. All I knew was that it was so. All the restlessness, the
reaching out for something I could never find before, was satisfied here. After all the months of weary, dangerous travel, taking me halfway around the world, I knew that I had really come home, in the deepest sense of the word. And it was a busy and interesting home that God in His goodness had finally allowed me to reach. There was so much to see, such a lot to do and learn. First of all, there was the language.

In the mornings Sister Rosario and I studied with a Chinese teacher. The intricate Chinese characters cannot be learned without the help of a native and a Chinese dictionary. Every character is made up of two or more parts and sometimes there will be half a dozen meanings for the same character, depending on the phonetic factor. The radical gives the clue to the meaning and the phonetic indicates the sound or tone. In speaking Chinese, the tones are very important. They are placed much as a vocalist places them: some high in the head, others in the nose, still others in the throat. This results in the sing-song effect of the spoken word. To speak a word in the wrong tone changes the meaning completely, sometimes with very humorous results.

Shortly after I started studying Chinese, I sent one of the Chinese women to the store to buy some fans for the orphans. She returned – very much bewildered – with a lot of umbrellas. The word for fan is San and the word for umbrella is also San but the tones are different. Another time I wanted a ball for the children. To my chagrin, the woman I sent for the ball came back with a bottle of wine. The word for balls is Jew and the word for wine is also Jew. Again, I had the right word but the wrong tone.

These mistakes showed me how much I had to learn. With grim determination to fit myself for the work I wanted to do, I dug and delved among the roots of the language. I learned the two hundred and fourteen radicals and the tones of the words, the aspires and non-aspires. I studied grammar and explored the idiom. Difficult as the language was, I found it fascinating.

One morning, I was having trouble with an idiom. I had worked for a couple of hours and didn’t seem to be accomplishing much. The goal that I had set myself for that morning’s work seemed hard to attain. My eyes were tired and strained from peering at the characters. I sat back in my chair with a sigh and as I did, I heard Father William’s voice from the doorway, “Having trouble, Sister?”

There was a merry twinkle in his eyes as he seated himself opposite me. He peered at the book over which I had been frowning, while I answered his question.

“Yes, Father. It’s such a difficult language to learn, isn’t it? But I must learn it!

Otherwise how shall I ever be able to help those poor people.”

“Of course you’ll learn it. We all had the same trouble when we first came out here,” he encouraged. Then he laughed quietly to himself. A network of laugh lines crinkled up the corners of his

Sisters Christina Werth, Rosario Goss, and Mary Mark Mullen, Mother Genevieve Ryan, Sister Magdalena Ivan in Hunan, c. 1934.

During the heat of the summer, the sisters resorted to a lighter color for their habits.
eyes. “Father Anthony will never let me forget my first attempts at using the language,” he reminisced. “On one of the big holidays, I sent my houseboy up to my room to get the flag and hang it out the window.” The old missionary rubbed his chin, smiling ruefully. “Well, anyway, Sister, my little China boy hurried back to Father Anthony in bewilderment. “What does the Shen Fu (Father) mean? He told me to get his wife and hang her out the window … and the Shen Fu has no wife.” The laugh his story provoked was just about what I needed at that point and I told Father so, wiping tears of laughter from my face.

Father William watched me a moment, a quizzical expression on his kind, intelligent face. “A sense of humor is one of God’s gifts to us, Sister. Anyone without it has no business here. Don’t worry about the language. It will come. There is plenty of time in China, you know……” He went on, “Sister Magdalena tells me she is taking you to visit one of our sick women this afternoon.”

“Yes, Father, she is!”

“You’ll be in good hands then,” Father smiled, “Sister Magdalena speaks Chinese very well.”

“She does indeed, Father!”

Sister Magdalena’s Hungarian ancestry made it easier for her to learn Chinese than for the rest of us, because of its resemblance to her native tongue. Both are monosyllabic and have many words with different meanings which are pronounced alike.

Our orphans, with their puckish aptitude for reading character, called her “The Small Quantity Sister, Like a Chinese;” a title won by her strict observance of poverty. If a two inch strip of adhesive were needed, two inches were used and not a fraction more. In this, she was like the Chinese, who never waste anything. This serious little nun graduated from Saint Joseph’s Hospital in Pittsburgh with highest honors. I agreed with Father that I would be in good hands that afternoon.

“There is so much to do for these people!” he sighed, getting briskly to his feet. “Well, I must be getting along. Good morning Sister.”

I was eager to start out on my first sick call. I hurriedly gathered up my books and took them to my room.

Directly after lunch, Sister Madgdalena and I set out. We had been given directions by one of the Chinese women in our compound and, with the fervor of the missionary spirit burning high, we picked our way through the twisting alleyways. Cautiously, we skirted the rubble and filth we saw. We went down one dark alley only to be confronted with another and still darker and more tortuous passage to cross before reaching our destination. Down and still down, until it seemed as though we were about to be plunged into some dark pit.

With a prayer to Saint Christopher for guidance, I felt my way along a slimy wall to a tiny bamboo hut. When we entered, I could
see nothing except the white of Sister Magdalena’s linens. As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I saw a shape move on the crude bed in the corner.

At our approach, the sick woman lit a scrap of paper from a bucket of hot ashes she kept in bed with her. These buckets of ashes are the only mans they have of keeping warm. Were it not for this crude heating system many of the people, especially the elderly ones, would freeze to death.

With the lighted paper in her hand, the old woman reached over and applied the flame to a wick in a small saucer of oil. The radiant light it gave was eerie. It cast great shadows on the mud plastered walls, wavered momentarily around the room, then flickered over the face of the woman on the bed.

In spite of myself, I gave an involuntary gasp of horror as the old face was highlighted by the burning wick. Her face was a ghastly white, the skin roughened and strangely bloated. Her features were a hideous mass of pussy eruptions, out of which glowed two strangely pathetic brown eyes. With the innate graciousness of the Chinese, she bade us welcome. My conversation was mostly in pantomime, with a sentence or two in Chinese, which the sick woman took as high compliment. Sister Magdalena turned to me and said as calmly as we were discussing the weather, “I think she has leprosy.”

At the word leprosy, a wave of terror engulfed my whole being. I suspected it when the wavering light shone on the woman’s face. Now I knew it was true. And with that certainty I became prey to absolute panic. Leprosy! Every instinct prompted me to run as fast and as far as I could. Then, as reason came to my aid, I was grateful for the darkness. No one would know how frightened I was. This was no way for a missionary to act. I began to pray for the sick woman. I prayed for courage for myself too. In my concern I forgot my fear.

It was a providential sick call. There in that dark room I learned a charity that is above fear of any disease or plague. In all the years I was to spend in China, among people with every kind of loathsome disease, I never again knew any emotion other than a burning desire to ease the pain of a tormented body and bring some measure of peace and comfort to an unenlightened soul.

That was a memorable day for still another reason. Not only was I conditioned against fear, I was also to learn the grimness of Chinese justice. Shortly before sundown, I left the compound on another errand, this time with Sister Rosario. We had just started out when, in the distance we heard shouts and the sound of many feet pounding in the dust. Above the din of the shouting we heard a creepy tune played on bugles. The tramp of feet came closer and we listened in bewilderment. The bugles’ tune grew louder as the mob approached. The notes shrilled like the scream of a man dying in agony. High above the macabre tune, we could now recognize what the mob shouted. It was one word, repeated over and over again; each repetition more brutal, more bloodthirsty than the last. It was, “Sha! Sha!” (Kill! Kill!)

As the procession passed us, we saw the victim. It was a man, his two hands tied behind his back. A board was fastened to the rope around his hands. On it were the characters which told of his crime. He had stolen a gun.

There was an expression of helpless terror on his face. Each time the bugles blew more lustily, calling all to come and witness the scene, the cries of “Sha! Sha!” became wilder. With each cry, the victim shrank as though from a blow given by a loved one. Who knows, perhaps in that mob, some of his own family did utter that cry, for in China, if one commits a crime and escapes, the next of kin must pay with his life for whatever crime has been committed.

As we stood there horrified, those cries of “Sha! Sha!” became in some strange way, an echo of “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” For weeks afterwards, the agonized look on that prisoner’s face haunted me. It made my meditation on the Passion very vivid.

We were badly shaken by the scene we had just witnessed, but our errand still had to be done. I did not realize we had to pass the execution grounds until I saw a body lying there, with its head a short distance away. As we looked, a huge pig started to gnaw at the corpse.

I looked at Sister Rosario’s white face. With trembling hands we blessed ourselves and breathed a prayer for the poor soul whose body had been so horribly mutilated. We hurried past the gruesome place and the mission seemed like a beacon in the darkness of the horror we had just seen.

We got back to the mission in time for dinner. To our horror, we saw pickled pig’s feet on the table. Sister Rosario sat across from me. Our eyes met, hers filled with dread. I knew she was wondering if this pig before us had fed on human bodies. Perhaps because there is so much of elemental brutality taken for granted by the Oriental mind, the beauty of China and the lovableness of its people – especially the children – make a permanent impression on an Occidental.

Nowhere are there more engaging youngsters than those I saw around me during my years in China. I grew to love them dearly.
and they trusted and gave their love to the missionaries. There is one instance that came to mind with particular vividness as I write.

A month after we arrived in Chikliang, Father Anthony Maloney, C.P., began making preparations for a much needed furlough. He had been the pastor for three or four years and the children in the mission were very fond of him. When they heard he was going back to America, they were heartbroken. They wanted to do something for him. So they decided they would have an entertainment and proceeded to work up a program.

The larger girls began rehearsing for a little three-act play “Sympherium.” Chinese have excellent memories and they are wonderful mimics, so it didn’t take the girls long to learn their parts. After they had their roles learned to perfection, they went to their friends and borrowed many beautiful and colorful costumes for the play.

The little girls – there were about eighteen of them between the ages of five and ten years – rehearsed some of their favorite songs and dances. They are very fond of dancing and are surprisingly graceful.

With Father Anthony being from Kentucky, we decided to close the little entertainment with a chorus number, in which all the orphans took part. The words of My Old Kentucky Home were translated into Chinese. It sounded very strange to me to hear the familiar Stephen Foster melody sung in Chinese. When this was learned, they were ready for the show.

The evening before Father Anthony left, he was invited to the girls’ dining room. Chinese lanterns and colorful paper streamers hanging from the ceiling gave the usually plain room a very festive air. All the Christians had been invited as well as the older people of the mission, such as the priests, the Sisters and the hired hands. It was a most enthusiastic audience.

Between the acts of the play, the little girls sang and danced. For the singing of “My Old Kentucky Home,” the larger girls stood in rows according to size, while the little tots sat – some on low Chinese stools, others on the floor. Their faces had been painted black and their hair dressed in pigtailed Topsy fashion.* Each one held a large piece of watermelon. They really did look like little piccaninnies.**

At first, everything went well with the closing chorus and they began singing the familiar old song beautifully. When they were halfway through, one of the tiny girls began to cry softly. Then a few more started and before the tune was finished, all the girls – big ones and little ones – were crying aloud and bitterly. The little ones sitting on the floor and looking up at Father Anthony were sobbing as though their hearts would break. Their faces were a study in yellow and black, where the tears made little rivulets down their cork-blackened cheeks.

I think Father Anthony had a hard time keeping the tears back too. Chinese children are very loveable and never forget a kindness. Father Anthony had been very, very kind to them. They were going to miss him and they knew they were losing a good friend.

**Chapter 4: The Siege**

The farewell party for Father Anthony was the last festivity the mission was to celebrate for a long time. In coming to our adopted country we were, of course, prepared to endure any kind of hardship to bring the faith of Christ to our people, but we had

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*“My Old Kentucky Home” is a 19th century antislavery, minstrel song by Stephen Foster. Blackface was being used in the 1920s and 1930s; famous examples are Al Jolson in The Jazz Singer (1927) and in Mammy (1930).

**Pickaninnie was a common slang term in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, in the 1930s, the term pickaninnie was a term used in literature (e.g. Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 Gone with the Wind) and in film (Shirley Temple, Poor Little Rich Girl, 1936).
no inkling how soon a major hardship would befall us.

Just two months after we arrived, Major Chen, the Military Governor of Chihkiang was murdered and his assassin took over command of the city. This rebel General knew the authorities in Hunan would spare no lives to quell the rebellion, so he began preparations for a siege that was to last for fifty-eight long, heart-breaking days.

The city wall, about four miles in circumference, was repaired and barricaded. Soldiers poured into the city, shouting and truculent. Soldiers poured into the city, shouting and truculent. Shopkeepers, from previous experience, carried on their trade with half-closed doors, eloquent intimation of the confusion and lawlessness about to descend on the city. The Chinese went about their daily routine with tense expectancy. There was fear and dread among the townspeople, an air of grim determined resignation for what was to come. All too well they knew what the next weeks would bring to Chihkiang. It was a knowledge we could not share; for the first time in our lives, we were to learn at first hand the sickening sound of a whizzing bullet as it flew past our heads, the nerve-shattering blast of an exploding bomb. Here, in miniature, was our baptism in a fire that was to spread shortly and engulf the whole world.

We immediately moved the orphans to the safest side of the compound. There were about forty children at the mission just then and six Sisters. We all had to live in two rooms on the ground floor of the convent.

The girls spread their bedding on the floor at night, and in the mornings they rolled it up and put it against the wall so they would have room to walk around and work. No one was permitted to go to the upper stories of the building; we were warned that when the firing started, the soldiers would be fighting from the wall around the city. So there was danger on the upper floors from crossfire.

About four o’clock on June twenty-ninth, the first shots were fired into the city. Immediately the city gates were closed and guarded. The battle had begun. All who were in the city had to remain, and anyone who was unfortunate enough to be caught outside the city gates when they were closed, had to stay outside until the siege was lifted, which was fifty-eight days later. A Protestant missionary, who was on the other side of the river visiting a sick Chinese woman, did not get back before the gates closed. She had to live with the woman all during the siege.

Day and night the fighting went on. The soldiers inside the city fought from the top of the wall and the enemy from the hills outside the city. The rebellious troops holding Chihkiang proved to be a malicious lot. They cursed the mission and threatened to burn down the buildings. One night after the compound had been closed and locked, a dozen or more murderous-looking rebel soldiers congregated outside the mission gate. They began pounding on the gate and shouting at the gateman, “Open up! Let us in!”

The city of Chihkiang was surrounded by a great wall, the outside of which can be seen here behind Father William Westhoven, CP, and his two companions.
“Go away! Everybody asleep here!” the gateman shouted back.
A shower of bullets over the wall and a more insistent demand for admittance was their answer. The uproar brought Father William running to the gate where the poor gateman covered in terror.

“Who are you and what do you want?” Father shouted above the tumult.

The Rebels refused to say what they wanted; just demanded entrance and threatened the people in the mission if their request was refused. Father tried to reason with them, but finally had to open the gate. When they got inside, they went around terrifying the orphans and the Sisters with their coarseness and arrogance. They filled several buckets with water from one of our wells and with a few last brutal jibes, they left. Many such incidents as this were to follow until our nerves began to feel the strain from lack of sleep and the constant noise of cannon fire.

Three weeks after the siege began, the Governor of Hunan sent a plane from Changsha to bomb the Rebels out. We had no way of knowing when the plane was coming and when it did come, it was over the city before it could be detected. I remember it was just five minutes after twelve. We were saying grace before lunch when suddenly the plane’s exploding bombs rocked the compound. Our plates went crashing to the floor and knives and forks jiggled and slithered the length of the table. Cups danced in their saucers and spilled milk and coffee made little rivers on the white table cloth. We were all stunned with fright and sat watching the havoc at our table with unbelieving eyes. All that is, except Sister Christina. “The Governor’s plane has arrived,” she commented dryly, stooping to pick up some of the broken dishes which littered the floor. Her haste to dispose of the debris in the midst of shell fire was entirely characteristic of Sister. The mess made by the bomb was a greater trial to her than its danger to herself. “Order is heaven’s first law,” was a favorite expression of hers and one that she observed to the letter. Our orphans nicknamed her “the nervous and fussy Sister” because she could not stand anything out of place. So, while we sat in a horrified silence, Sister Christina bustled around the table mumbling to herself, scooping up the broken china, her face red with exertion and annoyance.

A frantic hammering on the gate made Sister forget her smashed dishes. She hurried to open the door. A small blond woman stood there, her white dress torn and blood spattered and her blue eyes glazed with strain and fatigue.

“Oh Sister, I need help!” she gasped. “Many of our mission people are badly hurt. We can’t possibly care for all of them. Come quickly, sister, please!”

“Of course, Miss Welch. Come in, dear. You look as though a cup of tea would do you no harm,” Sister Christina added, leading Miss Welch to our table. “Sister Magdalena will pour it for you while I get out medicine kits.”

This was my introduction to Miss Anna Welch, a woman whom we all liked and admired a great deal. She is a German Lutheran Missionary, a member of the China Inland Mission. In Germany, she belonged to an order of Deaconesses and wore a religious garb similar to that of the Sisters of Charity. In China, she wears secular dress. She is a noble soul, courageous and self-sacrificing. We are indebted to her for many thoughtful kindnesses. When we first knew Miss Welch, she learned we were having a difficult time buying potatoes, for at that time, the Chinese raised them for the pigs only. Miss Welch arranged with a farmer, from whom the Protestant Missionaries got their supply, to raise a crop large enough to accommodate the Catholic Missionaries too. Perhaps the Chinese decided that if potatoes were good enough for white people and pigs, they might even be good enough for them, because not long afterwards the Irish potato found its place among the Chinese vegetables on the stands along the streets.

Their own lunch forgotten, Sisters Christina and Magdalena hurried off with Miss Welch to help as many of her people as they could. Sister saw that many were beyond help, but she and Sister Magdalena were able to save three women. The others, they made as comfortable as they could then returned to the mission.

Our days at the mission were hectic now, as the wounded, both soldiers and civilians began crowding into the mission gates for help. All the sisters worked from dawn until dark, cleaning and treating; binding torn flesh; setting broken bones; probing for bullets; stitching cuts; and easing the pain of burns. Very often, we left the safety of the mission walls to hurry through the dangerous streets to someone too seriously injured to be moved.

With the fourth week of the siege came the hottest weather Chikiaung had had that summer. The temperature hovered between ninety-eight and one hundred and seven degrees. In the midst of this, Sister Saint Anne became very ill from lack of nourishment. We could get no fresh fruit or vegetables, meat or eggs, because the city gates were barred. The farmers could not come into the city with their produce. We had a few skinny chickens in the mission and once in two or three days the hen would lay an egg. When she announced it, everyone in the mission ran rejoicing to find the egg for it meant subsistence for Sister Saint Anne. If the siege had not ended when it did, Sister would not be alive today. As it was, the mission catechist, Joe Lung, began looking around for a suitable coffin for her and at that time, even a coffin wasn’t an easy thing to find.

During this time, the Chinese had to eat pumpkin blossoms and lady slipper stocks that grew in the mission yard for we had no vegetables of any kind for them either. The blossoms were cooked in salt and vegetable oil and eaten with rice. Fortunately, there was plenty of rice on hand, for at the harvest time, the rice for the year is bought and stored in rice bins.

Hunger began to weaken the morale of the rebel army. Their ammunition was getting low, as well as their food supply. Each day more and more soldiers slipped out of the city and joined the enemy. Rumors began circulating through the city that the rebel General was going to attempt to fight his way out of Chikiaung. If he did, that meant the end of the fighting in our city. How hard the mission children prayed throughout the day that peace would come!

The next day a plane flew over Chikiaung dropping detonation bombs. When they struck, the blast could be heard the length
and breadth of the city, throwing the people into panic. The rebel General, then, thinking the buildings of the foreigners would be the least likely to be bombed, moved into a building near our mission. We waited in fear and trembling for the shelling and bombing of our own building. Stray bullets embedded themselves in the mission walls. At dinner, a bullet struck a basket just outside the dining-room door while the Sisters were at the table. Another bullet spattered against the church sacristy wall, just missing one of the girl orphans sitting nearby. A hanging lamp in the church was shattered.

The sum of the thousand dollars was offered for the assassination of the rebel General. If this were not accomplished, the authorities threatened to drop incendiary bombs on the city and the entire population of 40,000 hemmed within the walls would be wiped out. Evidently the provincial troops were attempting to stampede the populace into mutiny. But the four hundred guns defending the city were in the hands of the soldiers. The people were helpless. The rebel General swore he would leave the city without his troops, begging only for his life.

The evening before he left, he ordered his soldiers to collect all the kerosene oil in the city. Then the people who lived in little frame houses were ordered out of them. Just at midnight, the General himself came to the mission, requesting that his wife and mother be placed in the mission for protection. Father Edward politely declined the responsibility.

At dawn, we were awakened with the sickening news that the city was on fire. The reflection of the flames on our windows showed that the conflagration. Father Edward told the mission inmates to get water from the well and pour it on the buildings to protect them from flying cinders.

Soldiers outside the wall fired with greater intensity, hoping to break in amid the confusion. About one thousand houses in the city were burned to the ground that day. At noon, the billows of smoke that rolled across the city were dispelled and the fires within the city were brought under control.

The General had several of his wives in the city with him. When he left, he took only the first wife along. He wrapped her in a blanket, strapped her to the belly of his mule, threw a blanket over the mule, then mounted it himself. With his bodyguard, he rode across the river and escaped before the enemy realized what had happened.

When the enemy learned the General had escaped, they immediately rushed into the city and began looting. They were very anxious to find the General’s wives and searched every house where they thought they might be hiding. The soldiers even came into our compound. We had to stand in line while they looked us over. Then they asked some of the older girls who they were and where they came from. The poor girls were so frightened they could not remember their own names. The soldiers searched everywhere. Nothing was left free of their scrutiny. They even went into the room where Sister Saint Anne was lying so ill we expected her to die at any moment. One of the soldiers went over to the bed and stood looking down at her. Then he turned to the others with him and said, “She’s too white! She’s not a Chinese!”

After three days of searching, one of the wives of the General and the General’s mother were found. Then the bans were lifted and the city gates were opened again. Among the first through the re-opened gates was Bishop O’Gara with badly needed supplies for the mission. After fifty-eight days of horror, peace came to Chihkiang. Priests, Sisters and the orphans had come through the siege unharmed, save for a heavy toll on our hearts and nerves. Mass and prayers were offered to God in thanksgiving for the protection given us during those trying days.

When the siege was over, Sister Saint Anne began to improve and as soon as she was able to travel, with Mother Genevieve as her companion, Sister returned to America for medical care and a much needed rest.35

Her departure meant that I was to be in charge of the orphans and I loved working with them. It seemed like the old days at home and certainly I had had enough experience with children to understand their ways. Each day brought a new, added joy to my work among the Chinese. But happiness is not a daily portion for human beings; and this joy was short-lived for soon we began to hear rumors of Red activity in Hunan. Before long they began terrorizing the countryside, penetrating closer and closer still to our mission. Finally Bishop O’Gara ordered the Sisters to leave Chihkiang for the safer regions of Hankow.

Chapter 5: Exile in Hankow

In spite of the days of nerve-wracking worry we spent during the siege, it was a wrench to leave the mission in Chihkiang. Although we had been there less than four months, we had shared so much of the people’s hardships that we felt we were already

During their exile in Hankow, both the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of Charity went around the city caring for the sick.

Back row: Sisters Agnes Paula Conefrey, Rosario Gooss, Maria Loretta Halligan, Teresa Miriam Beschel, Beata Zarillo; Front row: Sisters Magdalen Ivan, Carita Pendergast, Marie Therese Tuan, Mary Mark Mullen, Finan Griffin, Ethelberta Carson.
one with them. We knew that we could best serve the people by being in readiness to come back to them when the Reds left our city. Nevertheless, it was with heavy hearts that we prepared to leave for Hankow. I watched my little children as though seeing them for the first time. Each little characteristic, every winning way, was stamped on my heart for all time, as I went among them, cheering them, and trying to make light of the coming exile.

The priests at the mission were to remain and carry on the work we were doing there. For nuns, it was not safe so long as the Reds were in the city. They had boasted that if they caught any nuns they would not kill them; they would nail them to crosses and keep them there until four pounds of gold were paid for the release of each nun.

The Bishop sent word that we were to be packed and ready to leave at a moment’s notice. Just the most necessary things were to be taken in baskets that would be easy to carry to the boats when the word came. After the day’s work was over and the dispensary closed, we packed and repacked in an effort to make the baskets as light as possible.

We waited anxiously and still no word came. Then we heard that the Red activities had lessened and so we unpacked a little at a time to find something we needed. The uncertainty went on for days. Then one day, we heard the Reds were coming closer.36 This time it seemed as though we really would have to start to Hankow. Boats and sampans were hired and a special gateman was posted at the main gate of the compound to keep watch. “The Bishop has come,” was the password.

If we got this word during the night, it was a signal we were to go quickly and as quietly as possible to the boats. For three or four nights, we slept with all our clothes on, even our overshoes; for if the word came during the night, we wouldn’t have time or light to search for anything.

About nine o’clock one evening, the gateman rushed in saying, “The Bishop has come!” We grabbed our baskets and lanterns and hurried to the boats. The river was running high and the current was very swift, so the boatmen refused to start downriver in the darkness. All that night, we stayed on the boat, huddled together at one end of it to keep warm. Early the next morning, as soon as it was daylight, the Bishop himself came rushing down to the boats telling us to hurry. “Hurry before it is too late to get away!”

The Reds were in sight. Soon other boats were crowding the water, for the officials of the city, their wives and children, were starting downriver too.

Our boatman must have been really frightened at the Bishop’s injunction to hasten, for I never saw a boat poled so fast in all the time I was in China. Sometimes the very speed at which we were travelling in a river of dangerous whirlpools threatened to send the boat crashing against the rocks. Fortunately, we didn’t have to cover the whole distance to Hankow by boat. At Changsa, we boarded a train and arrived in Hankow about ten o’clock in the evening.37

During our stay there, we lived with the Charity Sisters in the Jardine Estates and spent our time travelling about the city administering to the sick.38

Early in January of that year, a smallpox epidemic broke out there and the Bishop granted us unrestricted permission to go anywhere to help wherever we could. The epidemic was at its worst in the slum districts of that city and those who were not dying of smallpox were dying of starvation. Sister Carita, one of the Charity Sisters, and Sister Rosario volunteered to locate this stricken district. As the Hankow dialect is different from that of Chihkiang, the two Sisters were accompanied by a Chinese girl who acted as interpreter and helped carry the medicine kits.

When the people realized that the strange-looking women had come with medicine for them, the two Sisters were surrounded. There was infinite pathos in the way each sick man or woman cried out to the Sisters his need, each trying to get to the medicine kits first. The screaming and shouting of the frenzied sick attracted still greater numbers. The crowd around the missionaries became so large, the Sisters were unable to help them at all. Hemmed in on all sides by those poor people distracted with pain, Sister Rosario and Sister Carita had trouble to keep from being trampled upon.

Finally, above the din, the nuns managed to get the interpreter to tell the people to go to their homes and the Sisters would come there to help them. With a great deal of wailing and grumbling, the crowd thinned out. Those who had tried to reach the Sisters first and failed because others more agile then they had squeezed in ahead of them, now scurried to their homes. As they ran, they shrieked the news to whoever had failed to be the first to receive the medicine.

All that day and for many other days, we went from hut to hut, tending to the sick, giving food to the starving. Now that we had seen the conditions under which these poor people lived, we no longer wondered there was so much sickness among them. The land was swampy and the huts, which were made of bamboo mats, were hardly two feet apart. In each hut, the furniture consisted of a bed – a foot or so above the mud floor – a little bench and a stove resembling a gallon crock. In this stove, wood was kept burning and the huts were blue with smoke. There was no outlet for the smoke except through the low door of the hut. Our eyes stung and watered during the time we spent in each miserable hovel. Now it was no longer a mystery why most people in that

With Chihkiang and the area around it in unrest, the sisters were in exile in Hankow from November 1934 to August 1935. They lived with the Sisters of Charity of Convent Station in the Jardine Estates.
The Chinese government was trying to better conditions, but there was so much to be done. Going among the people, day after day, we realized what an enormous task the reeducation of the Chinese people really was. They were willing and eager to learn, we found, so while the task will be a great one, the obstacles are not insurmountable. No task can be, where there is willing cooperation.

One morning, Sister Rosario and I started out to visit our slum district. We passed a field where a group of people had gathered and they were looking at something on the ground and talking excitedly among themselves. When they saw us, one of the group ran toward us, asking if we could help an insane man. To reach the field, it was necessary to cross a ditch which was partly filled with refuse and stagnant water. Picking our steps with as much caution as we could, we found the remains of several infants who had been flung there when they died.

Quickly, we clamored up the side of the ditch to the field where the patient lay. A pitiful sight met our eyes. A robust young man, his feet drawn up behind him and chained to his hands, writhed on the ground, spitting and hissing at anyone who tried to approach him. When he had become insane, he had been chained and left there among the remains of the infants because there is no asylum in Hankow. We tried to get close enough to give him some medicine to quiet him but it was no use. No one dared come near him.

Just as we turned to leave, the crowd, thinking he had broken his chains and was pursuing us, started to scream and run. We started to run too, not daring to look back until we had crossed the ditch. From a safe distance we did look back. The soldier was on his knees just staring at us.

Something had to be done for that poor man! We tried to have him admitted to several hospitals but when the authorities learned he was insane, they refused to take him as a patient. After lying in that field for several days, the soldier became so weak the authorities considered him harmless and removed his chains. His wrists and ankles were badly cut and swollen. Straw was provided for him to lie on and bricks were placed under his head. He was fed daily but he was weaker each day we went to care for him.

We managed to erect a little bamboo hut and provided the poor fellow with warm clothing, but both Sister Rosario and I could see that the man was dying in spite of our efforts to help him.

As his body grew weaker, there were times when he was rational. I talked with him then. He was pathetically grateful for what we were able to do for him. He wanted to know more about a religion which would extend help to one like himself. During those lucid intervals, we instructed him in the truths of the Catholic Church. He listened carefully with a sincere interest that was deeply touching. Then one day, he expressed the desire to become a Catholic. So just a few hours before he died, Sister Rosario baptized him. I feel confident that he received from God the mercy which was denied him on earth.39

The year of exile was a busy one. We spent it helping the poor of that district and perfecting in every way we could, our knowledge of the Chinese language. Nevertheless, we were delighted when the time came for us to return to our mission.

We left Hankow on the twenty-first of August, 1935. We were due in Changsa at eleven o’clock that night. When the train neared the station, it stopped. A great General was in a private train ahead of ours, and we could not get off the train at the station. Finally, after waiting for what seemed hours, we decided to get out and walk.

Two Missionary Sisters of Mary – one a Chinese – met us at the station when we finally reached it on foot. They arranged for rickshas and we started toward their mission. Our baggage was delayed in reaching the mission so the Sisters provided us with whatever was necessary for the night. Although various nationalities were represented among these Sisters, they were united in their desire to make us welcome. Evidently, someone had sent them some canned American bacon. Since we were the only Americans and thinking they were giving us a special treat, they served it for breakfast raw. We didn’t have the heart to offend such kindly hospitality so we closed our eyes, prayed for courage and gulped it down.

When that breakfast was over, we went in rickshas to the river, crossed it and found the bus station. These Chinese buses are not made for the comfort of foreigners, but to make a three-day journey in four or five hours is worth the discomfort and inconvenience of riding them. That night we spent with the Augustinian Sisters. We had to speak Chinese while there, because they could not speak English and we knew no Spanish. It had been planned that we leave there the following day, but our visit was extended two days longer. The boatman, who was to take us on the next part of our journey, had not bought his supplies for the trip.

Sometime after we had reached our own mission, we learned with dismay that these same Sisters who had given us such kind hospitality, had to flee from their mission two days after we left. The Reds had penetrated as far as their city and had started toward the convent, intent on capturing the Catholic Sisters.

The trip by Chinese junk to Juanling was uneventful. It took three days to reach Chenki, where we changed to smaller boats and continued through that bandit district with a guard of ten soldiers.

The small boats have just one deck, with benches around the railing on one side of the boat. The deck will hold about two hundred people, but the seating capacity is for only fifty. Just before the boat starts, pandemonium takes possession of the deck. The Chinese yell, shout, drop their bundles or lose them, all to the shrill accompaniment of excited chatter. They push and shove in a mad attempt to gain one of the precious seats. Then goodbyes are screamed to those left on shore, as though the travelers were going away for fifty years or more. There is some reason, though, for the hubbub a Chinese makes when taking a trip anywhere. With the bandits and the Reds as a constant menace, there is
always the possibility that death lurks along some part of the trip.

When the boat got under way and the people quieted down, I began to read a letter from home which had been handed to me just as we left the convent. I was half way through my letter, when I noticed a Chinese looking over my shoulder at what I was reading. I paid no attention to him for I knew he could not read it, so I continued to enjoy my letter. Some of his friends joined him when they saw I didn’t mind. They had a look at the letter too, and then began discussing it among themselves, laughing and chattering about the queer-looking writing. As I finished the precious sheets, there were a dozen of the Chine excitedly talking about me and my letter. Finally, one of them got up courage enough to speak.

“What are you reading?” he asked.

“A letter from home,” I told him.

“Where is your home?” was the next thing he wanted to know.

“My home is in America.”

“Who wrote the letter?” my inquisitive one demanded.

“My father.” How Dad would have enjoyed this, I couldn’t help thinking as I answered.

“Your father can read and write!” he exclaimed, amazed.

“Yes,” I assured him, “my father can read and write.”

“And you?”

“I, too, can read and write.” By this time, I had difficulty in keeping from laughing.

There was a burst of excited chatter among the group as they listened to the questions and answers the Chinese and I exchanged. That I and my father were able to read and write was a matter of astonishment to these fellows. My inquisitive one continued, “Can everyone in America read and write?” I assured him that reading and writing were general accomplishments in America.

“What is your honorable name? What are you?”

“I am a Catholic Sister.”

“Oh, yes!” he nodded sagely. “You are the Catholic Church.”

By Chinese standards, my inquisitive one was being very polite. To ask all kind of questions, no matter how personal – and sometimes embarrassing – is courtesy in China. I watched them leave the boat, amused at the wide difference there is in customs. What would be considered very rude in America is good form in China.

During the rest of the boat trip, I passed the time imagining what the result of that same conversation would be if it had taken place on a New York subway.

The last day’s journey was made by chair over the mountains. My heart filled with gratitude to God for allowing me to come back to my beloved mission. We reached it about six o’clock on the evening of September ninth, almost a year to the day since we had departed. Our welcome by the Fathers, the children and even the pagans, was a touching one. After the noise of the fireworks – set off for our homecoming – had subsided, an almost holy quietude, deep and all-encompassing, filled my spirit. It was a moment rich in the thought that God had allowed me to return that I might give myself without stint to the work to be done there in His name, especially in behalf of the children, who moved me so deeply with the heartiness of their welcome.

**Chapter 6: China’s Children**

Those children and their millions of little brothers and sisters are the most valuable wealth of China and sadly, a high percentage of that wealth is being lost. Because of the unsanitary conditions which exist, many of them die very young. There are hopeful indications that the country is becoming increasingly aware of the need to safeguard more carefully the health of these children in whose hands rest the future hope of China.

Their short lives are lived with a strange joyousness and an intensity which I have seen in no other children. There is a curious mixture of childishness and maturity in their faces. For the most part, their childhood is a happy one – though it is harder than any other childhood on earth. I have never seen children with so much vitality. Even when they are sitting quietly, their faces have intense expressions of enjoyment, sadness or amusement. So many are orphans, left early to their own resources, soon learning to cheat,
to lie and to pilfer.

At the time I was given charge of the babies, three-year old Anna was the latest addition to the mission. As a tiny infant, she had been left at the gate of one of the outlying missions where there were no Sisters, so Father Ernest Cunningham, C.P. gave her to a Chinese woman to nurse until she was old enough to be taken into our mission.

She was a plump little body, with twinkling black eyes and shiny black hair. Her smile had all the sweetness that only a Chinese smile can have, showing two of the deepest dimples I have ever seen. She was bright as a new penny and never missed a trick. With quick gravity, she soon fitted into life at the mission.

One morning, before breakfast, Anna was walking through the courtyard on her way to the well, the little washbasin in her hands. She passed under the windows of the Sisters’ quarters as they were saying their morning prayers. She recognized Sister Christina’s voice intoning, “De profundis clamavi ad Te, Domine, exaudi vocem meam…” Completely puzzled, Anna told the older girls at the breakfast table that she had heard Sister Christina scolding the other Sisters.

The girls paid no attention to her. The next morning Anna passed the same way. Again came Sister Christina’s voice, “De profundis clamavi ad Te, Domine, exaudi vocem meam…” Anna was a little braver this time and stayed to listen. She heard the other nuns answer, “Fiant aures tuas intendentes in vocem reparationis meae…” The child stood rooted to the spot, her errand to the well forgotten, until the voices stopped and she heard us coming down the stairs to the chapel. At breakfast, again Anna told the older girls and this time insisted with fire in her black eyes that they listen to her.

“I heard it again this morning. I heard Sister Christina scolding the other Sisters. And what do you think? The other Sisters were talking back to her too!”

For all the angelic sweetness of Anna’s smile, she had a terrible temper when things displeased her and no amount of coaxing or spanking cured her. She developed a particular aversion to carrots.

One evening she sat at the dining room door, waiting for supper to be brought in. She had her rice bowl and her chopsticks clutched in her chubby hands. Her happiness was reflected in the little tune she sang as she waited.

When the rice was brought in, she was all smiles. Then came the vegetables and one of them was carrots. As soon as she saw the carrots, she let out a roar that could be heard for blocks. In a moment, the courtyard was filled with frightened youngsters and anxious nuns, each wondering what terrible thing had happened to Anna. The child’s face was livid with rage as she flung her chopsticks one direction and her rice-bowl another. To all our questions, all our attempts to soothe her, we got but two words, shrilled in childish rage. “Carrots, Carrots! No! No!”

From time to time though, there were more serious difficulties with the children than Anna’s dislike of carrots. Lazarus presented one such problem.

Lazarus was a country boy who came into the mission every Saturday night to be in time for Mass and stayed over the weekend. In the hot weather, he waited until after sundown Sunday night, when he would walk back to his father’s farm - a distance of about eight miles. He decided that he would like to have a wife, eyeing Judith, one of our orphans. Judith was willing, so the necessary arrangements were made and they were married at Mass.

After the wedding they went to Lazarus’ farm to live. And every weekend the two of them walked to the mission to hear Mass, staying with us until Sunday night. From time to time different articles were missing from the mission and the church.

Between the church and the rectory there was a bell tower. The base of the tower contained a small room with shelves around the walls, where the Fathers stored tools, oil, nails, door-knobs, hinges and the like. These supplies had been bought wholesale in Hankow, to be sent to the surrounding missions when needed.

One weekend after everyone had retired, one of the priests was awakened by the barking of his dog, Sau’K’Uai (Four Dollars). The dog was named because he was bought for four dollars when he was a puppy. He was a good watchdog and never failed to warn us when prowlers were about.

Father got up very quietly and went to the window just in time to see someone stealthily leave the tower and run toward the men’s quarters directly in the back of the rectory. He hurried downstairs
and up into the room where he thought the culprit had gone. All the men seemed sound asleep. Father suspected Lazarus, so he went over to his bed and threw down the covers. “What were you doing in the tower just now, Lazarus?”

“I wasn’t in the tower, Shen Fu. I have been sleeping here all evening.”

“Yes, you were! I saw you running with Sau’K’Uai barked.” With that, Father turned up the bedding that served as a mattress and found nails, screwdrivers, hinges and other pieces of hardware. All these things could be sold to the local storekeeper for a nice sum of money.

As soon as Lazarus realized that he had been caught with the goods, he scrambled out of bed and fell on his knees crying, “I’m sorry, She Fu. I want to go to confession now.”

The crafty rascal knew well that Father could not report him after he had made his confession, without violating the seal of the confessional.

Father jerked him from his knees.

“That can wait, Lazarus. First, I’m going to take you to the pastor.”

Lazarus’ bride, meanwhile, slept peacefully on the women’s side of the compound, never dreaming what her new husband had been up to. The next day, Lazarus was brought before Father William. The boy shamefacedly admitted taking many other things as well from the mission, even silks and linens from the church sacristy. He was locked in a rice bin until his farmhouse could be searched. Judith remained faithful to her light-fingered spouse, visiting him every day, slipping some dainty morsel to him through the bars of the rice-bin. Most of the stolen articles were found hidden on the farm and were brought back to the mission. After a few weeks, Father William permitted both Judith and Lazarus to return to their home without further punishment.

Among the twenty-five new orphans who came to us from Hankow in 1936 was a girl who proved to be another problem.40 We didn’t know anything about her parents, of course, but I rather suspected that she had some Japanese blood in her. She even looked more Japanese than Chinese and was silent, quick, and very tricky. The other orphans shunned her, having a hard time understanding her speech. It wasn’t altogether Chinese either. Her name was Katy.

Katy had been given an opportunity to go to school but she could not learn anything. She was quick and clean about her person however, so we decided to let her help in the Sisters’ kitchen. She liked to work there, for she got many a bite of foreign food, which seemed more to her taste than Chinese food.

One day, Sister Christina decided to teach Katy to make a pie. The child was very apt and the pie turned out nicely. Sister covered the pie, put it on a shelf near the window, and with an encouraging word of praise to Katy, went about her other duties, leaving the girl in the kitchen to prepare the vegetables for lunch.

The pie was too much of a temptation for poor Katy who had grown very fond of sweets. She nibbled and picked at the pie until by the time for lunch, there was scarcely any left. It was indeed a sorry sight then.

Directly after lunch, one of the older girls, Magdalena followed Katy upstairs, picking up a stethoscope from a nearby table, as she passed.

“Is it a sin to steal, Katy?” Magdalena asked, holding the stethoscope in her hand.

“Yes!”

“Now, Katy, if you will tell me the truth about the pie, maybe Sister will not punish you this time. Did you eat that pie or not?”

“It was the rat,” Katy insisted. Showing Katy the stethoscope, Magdalena said, “If you don’t tell me the truth, I can look into your stomach with this instrument and see if the pie is there.”

Thoroughly frightened, Katy fell on her knees before Magdalena, “Magdalena, please don’t tell Sister this time and I will never eat the pie again.”

Katy’s antics in the kitchen recalls to my mind an old Chinese woman, Lung P’o P’o, who helped the Sisters in the kitchen. Lung was her family name. P’o P’o was the title applied to any elderly woman whose duties were of a domestic nature. P’o P’o was old China from the top of her high domed forehead to her tiny pointed feet. Always busy in the kitchen, her blue jacket and modest Chinese trousers were a glad sight to the eye as she flew about peeling potatoes, washing vegetables, chattering meanwhile an incessant scolding to her helper. She was a devout Christian, however, and in her Oriental fashion, completely devoted to the nuns.

One morning, at breakfast, one of the Sisters took a sip of the coffee and made a wry face. We all tasted it and it was vile. “This isn’t coffee!” Sister exclaimed. “It tastes more like shoe polish.”

When breakfast was over, Sister Rosario went to the kitchen to inquire about the coffee. “P’o P’o, what happened to the coffee this morning? The Sisters couldn’t drink it.” “I don’t know, Sister. I made it just as I always have! Just like you taught me,” P’o P’o replied. “Well, it tasted awful!”

Sister then proceeded to examine the coffee pot. She poured off the remaining coffee, emptied out the coffee grounds, and along with them came a dark, lumpy mass.

“Look here, P’o P’o!” Sister Rosario’s startled voice brought the old one teetering closer. The slanty eyes followed the nun’s pointing finger. The wrinkled old face lit up with delight. “Oh, Sister! You found it! I’ve been looking everywhere for my stove rag.”

Chapter 7: A Chinese Wedding

In any part of the world, an approaching wedding is the occasion for great excitement and a flurry of preparation. Our mission compound was no exception to that generality. For as our orphan girls grew up, the age old desire for a home and a family of their own was a problem we had to meet and deal with.

One evening, just after supper, I was crossing the com-
pound on my way to our hospital, when Rita, who had been with us since she was a baby, stopped. “Oh, Sister, Sister Mark! My fourth cousin on my mother’s side desires to speak with you tomorrow morning before the sun is high. It is of the greatest importance,” she said, blushing.

“What is this great importance, Rita?” I asked, knowing well that it would be some offer for her in marriage. And Rita knew that I understood for she covered her face with her hands and ran from me giggling.

Sure enough, bright and early the next morning, an elderly Chinese woman sought me at the convent and with the usual ceremonious bow, told me she was Rita’s cousin. “And this time, honorable Sister, I am middle.”

In our part of China before the war, the bride and groom-to-be never talk to each other before they are married. Each has a person to arrange all the details of their wedding for them. This person is called a “middle.” The boy has a middle-man and the girl a middle-woman. When a boy’s parents think it is time for him to marry, they look around for a suitable girl. When they find one they would like, the middle-man is sent for. He talks to some woman who knows the girl and the two middles arrange the marriage. Very often, children are espoused by their parents in this way when they are infants. Usually, the children have to live up to that promise whether they like it or not, for it is not easy to break an espousal. Now, the Catholic Church does not permit Catholic parents to espouse their children in this way.

The boy that Rita’s relative came to see me about was a lad from a middle class family, suitable in every way. But Chinese courtesy demanded that I should hesitate and demur at his suitability. I did and the old woman launched into a lengthy and flowery discussion of his worth and merit. I was hard put to keep from laughing, for if any lad was the paragon she painted him to be, it seemed to me that he would have been snatched up long ago by some practical Chinese girl. However, I listened and seemed to soften and then the middle got down to the practical aspects of the proposed wedding.

“Honorable Sister, it is necessary that Rita have many things to take to the future home of her honorable husband. She must have two large pieces of bedding made of cotton.” These are something like our old fashioned comforters but much, much heavier. One piece is used to sleep on, the other is used instead of blankets. Both pieces of bedding are covered with brightly colored flowered cloth. I nodded in agreement and the old woman continued, “For the bed, she must have a spread and two pillows.” The pillows she spoke of are about half the size of one of our pillows and are made of coarse white or unbleached muslin. Their pillows are filled with rice hulls and feel like two blocks of wood. They are covered with pillow cases which must be embroidered in many bright colors by the bride.

The old one paused for a much-needed breath and looked at me anxiously. “Can this be, so that my kinswoman is not ashamed in the house of her husband?”

“There must be discussion of this matter with the other Sisters first,” I told her. “Then, when three days have elapsed, when the sun is high, return to me and I will tell you our will in this matter.” Rita’s middle nodded wisely and bowed. “It is well. In the time you say, I will be here.” And she teetered out of the room.

As the lad was a very good match for our Rita, the necessary permission was given for the marriage and plans for the wedding went on apace. Rita began making her wedding shoes as custom demands and these must be either of bright red or pink satin with flowers embroidered on the tips. She must also make enough everyday shoes of serge or brightly-hued cloth, to last her for several years.

Just at dusk on the evening before Rita was to be married, some women friends came to her. When Rita saw them coming, she began to wail and cry. She tried to hide but they searched her out and brought her to a low stool in the center of the room.
Beacon in the Dark – (continued)

It amused me to see the playacting of our orphan, because it is customary in China for the bride-to-be to pretend reluctance at this ceremony. Actually, she is eager for what follows. For after she is seated on the stool, the women start to make her beautiful for her wedding.

With their long pointed fingernails, they pluck out her eyebrows until only a thin line remains. Then, where her hair grows unevenly around her forehead and at the back of her neck, they pluck and pull, strand by strand, until the line is so even, her hair looks like a tightly-fitting skull cap. When all the women agree that the hair line cannot be bettered, they start on her face. They take two pieces of silk thread and cross them. One of the women puts one end of the crossed silk in her mouth, holding it firmly with her teeth. With the other end held tightly in her hand, she scrapes the bride's face, until not a hair or a bit of fuzz can be seen. This is really torture but the bride sits there and never whimpers.

After all her face hair has been removed, they cover her skin with a dead-white powder. Her lips are painted a pomegranate red and her cheeks are rouged. Next, her wedding dress and veil are tried on. If everything meets with the approval of these women, the finery is put away until the following day. Rita did look beautiful, according to Chinese standards, so when the women had put away the wedding clothes, Rita, with graceful ceremony, served these friends with tea and little cakes. After the women left, the older orphans sat around with Rita for a while, chattering of the coming day.

When I first came to China, I was surprised to learn that the groom usually sends friends of his bride-to-be to do this torture. He must also furnish all of the bride's clothing, even the dress and veil. Only her wedding shoes are expected. Then the day before the wedding, her clothes, with bracelets, earrings and rings are sent to the home of his prospective bride. Everything is arranged on trays, each piece placed so that it can be seen by all, as it is carried through the streets to her home. With the wedding trays go trays with gifts for the bride's family. These gifts would be a couple of live ducks, chickens, a leg of pork and a fish. All go flapping along the street tied to the edge of the tray. One of the trays would probably contain a small package of tea, sugar, a plate of fruit in season, and sometimes a small cake. Since we had taken care of Rita since she was a baby, these gifts would be for the Sisters. There would also be a few dollars, wrapped up in red tissue paper. The money is for the person who empties the trays for the Sisters. Then the bride-to-be asks one of her friends to take the gifts into the house. Until they are there, no one must touch them. And Chinese politeness demands that one leave something on the tray. One must never take everything that is sent. A chicken, a duck or a cake is usually left on the tray.

When everything has been seen and admired, all the gifts are placed on the same trays and carried to the home in which the bride is to live. This is generally the home of the groom's family. Firecrackers are put off then to announce the arrival of the trays at their destination.

Rita's wedding day was bright and sunny. They were married at early Mass and right afterwards, a bright red chair decorated with gay-colored flowers was waiting at the church door for Rita. When she had been helped into her wedding chair, the curtains around it were drawn and no one was allowed to see her until she reached the home of her husband. He walked beside the chair, as custom demands, and his hands alone would part the curtains and carry his bride into her new home.

I've noticed that when one of our girls was married, it was not long until another wanted to do likewise. So several weeks after Rita's wedding, another of our girls, Collette, wished to embrace the holy state of wedlock. She knew her father's health was failing and that it was his dearest wish that she be settled in her own home before his death.

Mr. In, her father, met with great opposition and severe criticism for not choosing a wealthy pagan for a son-in-law. But he told them he wanted God's blessing on the marriage of his only child and with that, the angry relations had to be content.

Then, quiet little Collette shocked the good people of Chikhian by asking for...
a WHITE wedding veil, such as she had seen in Shanghai, instead of the traditional red silk. Her request was granted and the Sisters were asked to make the veil. On her wedding day, for the first time in the history of Chikhkang, the bride and groom walked side by side down the aisle.

When it was time for the banquet, Chinese customs were faithfully observed. The men were served in the men’s compound, the women in our compound. During the early part of the banquet, the bride does not appear. At the appointed time, Collette, wearing her white veil, entered the dining hall and poured wine for each guest, after which she again left them to themselves.

One of the most delightful characteristics of the Chinese is their innate simplicity. It is deeply ingrained in every class, even in the poorest laborer. One might almost call it a nonchalant sang-froid. An amusing instance of this quality was demonstrated by a relative of Collette’s.

He was a bricklayer and at the time of the wedding, he was building a high wall at one end of our compound. Since he was a big, wild, apish-looking fellow, always fighting, we nicknamed him Tarzan.

On the morning of the wedding, Tarzan was working on the top of the wall. A guest called to him that it was time for the banquet. He climbed down the ladder, washed his hands and put on a long blue silk Efu (coat), which he had hung on the limb of a tree in the yard. He put the coat on over his dirty working clothes. On his head, he perched a tiny straw hat – something like the kind men wear in America – only this one was about three sizes too small for him. He shoved his dirt-caked, stockingless feet into a pair of cloth shoes and went charging into the banquet.

When he had eaten and drunk much more than he should have, he went back to the wall, climbed to the top, hung his coat back on the tree and finished the work that the banquet had interrupted. We laughed for days about Tarzan and his wedding dress.

After the wedding banquet was over, Pius, one of the boys who helped in the dispensary, was heard to say, “I don’t know what kind of a wedding it was. It was neither Chinese nor foreign.”

Others, like Pius, were to be puzzled by the infusion of Western ideas on their Oriental customs.

## Chapter 8: A Chinese School

Many times I have seen the Chinese shake their heads in bewilderment and insist vociferously that foreigners did things backwards, completely opposite from the way they were accustomed to do. After my first visit to a Chinese classroom, I was able to appreciate their point of view more clearly.

I was told the children were having a study period. To me, that meant a classroom comparatively quiet. When I entered the room, my ears were assailed by a wave of sound unlike anything I had ever heard in America. It was the z-z-z-m-m-m sounds of the Chinese characters, repeated over and over again in sing-song childish voices; continuous as the ebb and flow of the ocean on a calm day, and as lovely to listen to as the first trill of a gay robin on the fresh green, spring grass. It was unforgettable. After that, I could see why our ways of doing things seemed “backwards” to the Chinese. Since then, too, I’ve been able to understand the difficulties Sister Rosario met with during her first days in a Chinese classroom.

Sister taught music, art, and two classes in arithmetic. She described vividly to me those first days in a strange Chinese class. For instance, she is not likely to forget her first class in arithmetic at our mission school. There, seated before her were rows of eager, bright black eyes, twinkling with curiosity and mischief, watching the new teacher seated on the platform. Hands folded demurely in front of them, the girls waited for Sister Rosario to begin. She opened the arithmetic. There were pages and pages of strange characters which she did not recognize. The room was quiet. The only sound to Sister’s ears was the crackle of the pages as she turned them hastily, looking for some characters that were familiar.

Finally, she closed the book in despair and decided to teach without a book, something our girls had never heard of before – fractions!

Instead of saying “two-thirds and four-fifths,” it required a great deal of effort, to say nothing of concentration, to say instead backwards “thirds-two and fifths-four.” The children’s eagerness to learn was a stimulus to Sister, and she put forth every effort to present the work in an intelligent way. The progress of the girls must have been a gratifying reward for Sister’s work.

One day, Sister Rosario was teaching arithmetic to the first graders, when a little girl announced that someone had stolen some money she had brought with her to buy a book. The classroom was searched but the money could not be found. Then Sister gave them a little talk on honesty. She told them if they stole little things when they were children, they might become bandits when they grew up. The she asked, “Do you know what happens to bandits?”

Every Chinese child is familiar with executions. So, they shouted in unison, “They kill them! They kill them! They cut their heads off!” A little tot in the front row looked up with round eyes and lisped, “If you have your head cut off, you can’t eat!” The dismissal bell cut short the giggles which followed the tot’s remark and Sister went on with the next class.

The second graders were finding it difficult to understand a problem in arithmetic. Sister Rosario patiently repeated, “Last night a rat ate one egg. Today it ate none. How many eggs did the rat eat?” Instead of concentrating on the rat’s meal, the children were talking and pointing to the crucifix above the blackboard. As soon as they saw Sister looking at them, one of them shrielled, “Sister, Mao Chia Tsan had God in her pocket and she won’t give Him up.” Poor little Mao Chia Tsan, one of the frailest creatures in the class, sat on the end of the bench, her hands tightly clenched, holding something in her pocket. Tears streamed down her cheeks and she looked frightened to death.
Beacon in the Dark – (continued)

Sister called her over and asked her to show what she had in her pocket. The child drew out a little iron cross which was twisted and blackened as though it had gone through fire. The image was missing. Sister’s mind flashed back to the bombardment of the city during the siege.

Little Mao Chia Tsan, trembling, explained, “I picked it up outside the East Gate. I did not steal it. Sister asked if she would like to keep it and the child answered, “Yes!” She promised not to insult the cross but to treat it reverently, so Sister told her she might have it. Instantly, the most appealing smile flashed across the child’s tear-wet face. She bowed gravely to Sister and went back to her place. Then Sister explained the difference between God and His Image and a cross. The children were so accustomed to adoring idols, they thought the crucifix was an idol in the Catholic Church.

While the children of the mission school were puzzling over fractions and learning the difference between idols and the Crucifix, the adults of Chihkiang were learning lessons too. Chihkiang is noted for being one of the cleanest cities in the interior of China. But in 1936, when the New Life Movement spread throughout the country, Chihkiang also was affected. Soldiers gave orders that everyone was to clean his house and the property surrounding it. In our three years in China, we had never seen such cleaning as went on then. When we visited the sick, we were greeted at the door by a cloud of dust. Those who did not die of disease before the cleaning campaign was over, probably would die of fright, because the poor people just didn’t know what it was all about. They were literally terrified. A dear old Christian woman came out to meet us one day and complained that her arms ached so badly she could hardly raise them. She had scrubbed the outside of her house several times but could not remove the characters the Reds had painted on it during their visit several months ago. She finally got a carpenter to plane the characters off the house. Sister Rosa- rio advised the poor woman to go to bed.

“I can’t go to bed,” she wailed. “The soldiers come every day to see if this house is clean. If it’s not finished tomorrow, I’ll be fined a dollar.”

After the cleaning was finished, the inspectors again examined the houses and pasted on the outside wall small blue and white papers containing characters of praise. The one on the mission property read “Super excellent.” Then, the last night of the cleaning campaign, there was a grand parade and each person taking part carried a banner on which was written a suitable slogan for the New Life Movement.

One of the improvements of the New Life Movement was the placing of garbage boxes in the streets. One of our neighbors, seeing the nice new wooden box in front of her house, was delighted at the new place on which to dry her clothes. To her indignation, a soldier came along and threw the clothes on the ground. Then, he opened the lid of the box and dropped into it a pair of shoes the woman had left there to dry. Her cries of “Ai-yah! Ai-yah!” echoed down the length of the street for many minutes after the soldier.

Easter 1936 – Sisters St. Anne Callahan, Christina Werth, Magdalena Ivan, Rosario Goss, Catherine Davenport, and Mary Mark Mullen
was out of sight. For some reason, her cries seemed to annoy Shong Tom.

Shong Tom was the man who cooked for the priests. He had been with the missionaries in this capacity for thirty years and was very proud of his position there. But ill luck seemed to dog Shong Tom. His second wife, Maria, was dying of tuberculosis and one Sunday afternoon, the Sisters were called over to see her. When they arrived, they saw at once that the woman was near death, so they sent for the priest. After she had been anointed and received the last Sacrament, Father began the prayers for the dying. While these prayers were being said by Father and answered by the Sisters, one of the pagan relatives came into the room. A glance at the dying woman caused her to hurry from the room into the kitchen. There she hurriedly fried several eggs very hard. After they were fried, they looked like a large pancake. Then, in the midst of the prayers, she rushed into the room where the priest and the Sisters were kneeling and flopped the eggs over the dying woman's nose and mouth. This is a pagan custom of the Chinese to keep the breath from spreading the disease to the other members of the family.

The Sisters, of course, were dumbfounded at the woman's action and without stopping the “Ora Pro Nobis,” Sister Christina, who was nearest the dying Maria, reached over, grabbed the eggs and threw the mass the length of the house. Sister Rosario had to duck to keep from being hit by the flying eggs.

While all this was happening, the husband, Shong Tom, was out on the street arguing about the price of a coffin. During the haggling, the solemn prayers went on but the Sisters nearly strangled trying to keep from laughing. Sister Christina was so disgusted that at the first opportunity, she gave the Christians who were present, a lecture on superstition. On the way back to the Mission, Father said to the Sisters, “Please, don’t ever throw those egg pancake curves again! I nearly choked to death trying to keep my face sober and finish the prayers for poor Shong Maria.”

Chapter 9: Chihkiang Goes Modern

When we arrived in China in 1933, Chihkiang boasted a single vehicle - a wheelbarrow! This was an unwieldy contraption with bulging sides and a heavy, primitive wheel of dilapidated wood. But with the passing years, the inexorable march of progress was beginning to penetrate even so far as the mountain-fast isolated city of Chihkiang. Here in this walled city, where for generations, living had been geared to the customs of China’s ancestors, new and sometimes startling innovations were taking place. Now three years later, a bus road was being constructed and even before it was completed, cars as well as bicycles and rickshas rushed along it with sublime indifference to the laws of gravity and the life and limbs of pedestrians. Chihkiang was savoring the intoxication of

First bus crossing the bridge at Chihkiang, 1936
speed for the first time in its history and finding it a heady potion.

We took the mission children to see the first bus which made its appearance in our city. Some of the little girls were afraid of it, but most of them soon overcame their fear of the awe-inspiring object in a great curiosity to see this “Western monster.” As they cautiously drew near, I heard one of the little girls experimentally tapping its side. Little Yang Mei called out, “It has copper skin and it makes a noise!”

They could not agree with their pagan friends that the motor car had an evil spirit. They did conclude, after examining it gravely, that if it were not an animal, at least there must be a wild beast hidden inside to make it go. They wondered what the beast looked like and what it ate.

A month later, three buses arrived in Chihkiang in one week! Slow old China was moving ahead fast. The day of the sampan was about over; a trip that required two weeks by sampan when we were on our way to the mission can now be made in one day over the new bus road.

With the latest modes of travel came foreign clothes. Western articles of various kinds were to be found in the stores, many of which had even adopted glass windows and show cases. The people took to the new innovations eagerly and were avid for more. Their eagerness for all the new things they saw sometimes made me fancy they had just awakened from a long, long sleep and couldn’t wait to catch up with all they had missed.

The New Life Movement brought in its wake Chihkiang’s first moving picture. The film was shown three consecutive nights, so Father William sent the catechist to censor the picture and report whether or not it was suitable for the girls to see. When the time came for the girls to go, there was no woman willing to assume the responsibility of taking such a large group out at night. So it was finally decided that the Sisters would go with them.

What a gal’s night it was for those poor little orphans! The picture was shown on the grounds of the public school. The beautiful big lawn, dotted here and there with great trees over a thousand years old, was ablaze with lights. These were the first electric lights the children had ever seen and their faces were a study in bewilderment and delight. They just stood and stared and stared as though they could never see enough of so much light. Finally we managed to get them into their chairs. When the chattering about the wonderful electricity had died down, they noticed the usher who came around with watermelon seeds and hot tea, free to anyone who wished them. Then a vendor went through the audience selling candy and chewing gum. “Chewing gum? What was that?”, they all wanted to know immediately. Instantly, there was a clamor for this chewing gum.

Sister Christina bought some for each girl. As one child after another received the eagerly desired gum, Sister warned her anxiously not to swallow it. I doubt if her warnings were heard at all. Every child was intent on examining this “new strangeness.” The gum was quickly unwrapped, turned over on both sides, felt, smelled, then experimentally licked with small pink tongues. The taste pleased them. So the sticks were popped into their mouths. Their little faces solemn, they began chewing, slowly at first, then as the flavor of the gum trickled down their throats, there were giggles of appreciation and crows of approval from a chorus of the happiest children in China. Then a Pandora in the group decided she wanted to see what the chewed gum looked like. Her busy little fingers began pulling the gum into strings, like a child at a taffy pull. Of course some of the others had to do the same! Soon there were roars and howls as the chewing gum stuck to fingers, faces and hair. I am certain before they were quieted again that Sister Christina regretted her generous impulse. Those who had been content to keep the gum where it belonged choked with laughter at the sight of the gum-stuck girls. The thriftier ones among them saved the gum for days and the hard little wads of it were among their greatest treasures.

When the picture began, the chewing gum was forgotten in astonishment at this new marvel. It was a Chinese picture, but so few of the people were able to read, a man stood in the middle of the aisle and read the captions aloud. Our girls were very proud of the fact they could read the captions themselves. The picture completely absorbed them; especially were they interested in the telephones used in the picture. They had never seen one, but they
knew men were working on the poles and wires near the mission. Now that they had seen what one looked like, they couldn’t wait until a phone was installed in Chihkiang. There were many in the audience who were more interested in the machine showing the picture than in the picture itself. These sat with their backs to the screen intent on watching the bluish stream of light coming from the projection booth. Our children didn’t want to leave. They wanted to see it all over again. After that evening, it was difficult for a while to get them back to the routine of school. They wanted to go to the movies every day.

That interlude of peace was soon shattered by disturbing rumors of more Red activity in the region. This time, we could not leave even if we had wanted, because the roads that were not blocked by the Reds were infested with bandits.

On the first of December, Father William started a novena of Masses to the Holy Souls for the protection of Chihkiang as well as its people. He exhorted the Christians to keep in the state of grace and not to deny they were Christians if the Reds should come.

People living outside the city wall were ordered to tear down their homes or they would be burnt to prevent their being used as hiding places by the Reds. Farmers were told to bring into the city all wood and food supplies. It was a sad thing to watch the processes that passed our gates day after day, men carrying logs on their shoulders, others balancing baskets of rice from long poles across their backs. Women trudged along burdened with their bedding and whatever other household articles they could manage to bring with them. I wondered where they were all going to live, for the city was overcrowded as it was.

More Protestant missionaries from neighboring towns came to Chihkiang for protection, making a total of thirty-four foreigners in the city. Someone called it the “Foreign Concession of Hunan.”

Mr. Becker, the Protestant minister in charge at Chihkiang, was a man with “face” among the Chinese. At one time, he was even the mayor of the city—an office which no foreigner could now hold. Through Miss Welch, he learned that the Sisters needed some dental work done. So, one afternoon, he came to the mission and told us that while he was not a dentist, he had studied in order to take care of the dental work of his co-workers. He assured us he would be glad to be of service to the Sisters in whatever dental work they needed done. Nor would he accept any pay for his labor. The only way we had of expressing our gratitude to him was in the form of Christmas gifts to him and his wife.

At this time, he had just returned to his mission after having been away for months negotiating with the Reds for the release of two of Mr. Becker’s missionaries who had been captured by the Communists about a year before. A ten thousand dollar ransom was demanded but when it was given, only one man was released. Fifty thousand more had to be collected. When Mr. Becker heard that the Reds were coming by three different routes, he wired Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, telling him there were foreigners in Chihkiang who could not get out and asked his assistance. The Generalissimo telegraphed to Changsha, commanding that Chihkiang be protected. If this town were in danger, the government troops were to come there at once.

Meanwhile, the town crier called for a man from each family to go to the city wall and help protect Chihkiang. Some men must keep watch at the gate of every home during the night. The two priests alternated in keeping watch at the mission gate. That same day, word came that troops were on their way to Chihkiang.

The Christians were very much concerned about the safety of the Priests and Sisters. The girls watched us constantly to see whether or not we made preparations to leave. We would rather have faced the Reds than leave them again, had the choice been left to us. As it was, there was no choice in the matter. Flight was more perilous than remaining where we were.

For three nights after that, the fighting was heavy. More Reds poured into the city but, thank God, they didn’t stay long. They learned the Government troops were on the way and the afternoon the troops arrived, the Reds left. Many of the soldiers who had defended the city were killed or wounded.

The city gates were reopened when the Reds left and those who had remained in their homes on the opposite side of the river came to the mission to report the treatment they had received at the hands of the Communists. One of them, a woman who refused to give the Reds the money they demanded, was kicked and beaten. She got such a blow across her right eye the sight was gone when she came to the dispensary for treatment. Other victims came for medicine, each with a sad story of his trouble at the merciless hands of the Communists.

In the midst of this invasion, we received word that Sister Catherine was on her way to the mission, but had been delayed in Chenki by the Reds. Sister Catherine declared afterward that she might as well enter an enclosed order as to try to live up to all the promises she had made for her safe arrival. It was not until the twenty-fourth of March she finally reached the mission. She was the first missionary to arrive in Chihkiang by bus.

The arrival of Sister Catherine, who was a registered nurse, was most opportune. The number of dispensary patients was increasing daily and caring for the sick and wounded became a greater and still greater part of our mission work. The Red invasion had left a trail of broken and ill Chinese who were grateful for Sister’s expert help. It was not long until the Chinese began calling her “the Very Busy Sister.” Often, she would finish her work at the dispensary, hurry off to sick calls, only to come back to the mission to find more waiting for her help. But she never seemed to tire. Though she is a very small and fragile-looking woman, her quick wit and ability as a raconteur, make one forget her size in admiration of a dynamic personality. With the increase of our patients, the number of baptisms grew. Each morning the line waiting at the dispensary was longer. Cautiously at first, and then with increasing confidence, the Chinese came to us for help for their bodies as well as their souls.

Many of those who came to us for help spoke our language. One afternoon, a man came to the mission and asked Sister Catherine to see his wife. He spoke English with slow painstaking effort and was very proud of his accomplishment. Sister promised she would visit the man’s wife that very day. Arriving at his house,
Sister found her husband in a very serious condition. She explained to the man that his wife’s condition was very grave and she could not hold out much hope for her recovery. However she did all she could for the patient; visited her daily, but the woman was beyond help.

A few days later, Sister Catherine met the widower on the street. He appreciated Sister’s efforts to save his wife and expressed his gratitude in halting English this way: “Sister Catherine, my wife, she die. Many thanks to you!”

Note: This original 1946 manuscript is reprinted with permission from the Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden. The second half of Beacon in the Dark will appear in the fall 2018 issue of Gathered Fragments.

ENDNOTES:
1 Mary Mark Mullen, C.S.J., Beacon in the Dark, unpublished manuscript, Record Group 506.1 China Mission, Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives (CSJB Archives), Chapter 3.
7 Stanislaus Grennan, CP to Bonaventure Callaghan, SSJ, March 24, 1924, CSJB Archives.
9 In Mother Bonaventure’s letter to Father Stanislaus, dated May 31, 1924, she stated that the vote was 74 in favor of 78. In her letter to Bishop Boyle, dated January 14, 1926, her tally was 77 votes, 74 in favor, 1 against, 2 no vote. CSJB Archives.
10 The original name of the city was Yuanchow. In 1935, the name was changed to Chihkiang. Today, the city is known as Zhijiang.
12 “Letter from Bishop to Father Stanislaus,” CSJB Archives.
13 Prendergast relates a version of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
14 Joseph Lo Pa-hong (1875 -1937) founded Catholic Action in 1911 and remained influential until his assassination in 1937 (Source: Carbonneau, Ecclesiastical History, 4.).
15 Prendergast recorded that the journey from Hankow was overnight train to Changsha, bus to the junk, junk to Hankow; Havoc, 45-46.
16 Shanghai’s French Concession lasted from 1849 until 1946.
17 According to Prendergast, Father William Westhoff had been accompanying the sisters since Convent Station, Havoc, 42-43.
18 Prendergast writes his year of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
19 Prendergast relates a version of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
20 Prendergast writes his year of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
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31 Prendergast writes his year of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
32 Prendergast writes his year of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
33 Corrected year. In the original manuscript, the year was cited as 1925.
34 Mother Genevieve only accompanied Sister St. Anne as far as Shangh hai and returned to Chihkiang by January 2, 1934. Sister St. Anne continued on to the United States, reaching Baden by December 1933.
35 According to Sister Mary Mark, the Jardine Estates were built by missionaries repented of having made haste at so great a risk.”
36 Most likely, Sister Mary Mark has written the incorrect year. In September 1935 (CSJB Archives). The sisters stayed there from November 1934 through August 1935. See Havoc, 57-67, for the Sisters of Charity stories on this period.
37 Prendergast relates a version of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
38 According to Sister Mary Mark, the Jardine Estates were built by priests and about an hour walk or a 30 minute rickshaw ride from town. See: Letter, Mary Mark Mullen, SSJ, to Marcus Mullen, August 18, 1935 (CSJB Archives). The sisters stayed there from November 1934 through August 1935. See Havoc, 57-67, for the Sisters of Charity stories on this period.
39 Prendergast writes his year of this story as occurring earlier in the trip in Shanghai, Havoc, 43.
40 Most likely, Sister Mary Mark has written the incorrect year. In September 1938, Madame Chiang Kai-Shek placed twenty-five orphans with the Sisters of St. Joseph.
41 Established by Chiang Kai-Shek and his wife in 1934, the New Life Movement was a government-led movement to revitalize the country through cultural reform based onNeo-Confucian ethics.
42 “Foreign: Other News,” Cincinnati Enquirer, December 3, 1935: “American headquarters of the Passionist Fathers...reported it had received a cablegram yesterday from its Hunan missionaries which said the Communists had taken Supu and Chenki and were advancing on Chihkiang-Yuanchow in Western Hunan. ‘City prepared for sie げ. Father, sisters impossible evacuate,’ the cable said.”
43 On October 23, 1939, Margaret Becker was assassinated with the China Inland Mission.
44 “The road was unfinished and the trip beset with dangers, so great that the Missionaries repented of having made haste at so great a risk.” Rosario Goss, SSJ, “History,” c. 1946, MS, CSJB Archives.