



MAIN STREET, PAOSHAN.

## JUST OUT OF CHINA

### *We Interview A Quaker From Chungking*

EVERYWHERE in the world to-day the Relief Work—from war or natural disaster—of the Quakers is well known and well appreciated. When, therefore, *The Listener* learned that Harry Silcock, Secretary of the Society of Friends' Service Council in China, was in Wellington, having come from Chungking on a Round-the-Pacific tour connected with plans for immediate post-war reconstruction efforts in the East, we were quickly on his doorstep. Mr. Silcock was found to be a tall, quiet man whose erect spare frame belied his 63 years.

First interest, of course, was to hear about conditions in Chungking from one who had ended two and a-half years' residence only in December last. China's new capital really deserved its title of "the world's most bombed city" said Mr. Silcock. Once in 1941, for example, Japanese radio had announced that the sirens would be kept ringing for 100 hours on end, and in effect they were. Nevertheless, despite lack of defences, casualties were extremely few. Chungking occupies a bluff in the hairpin bend of a river and its rock has been honeycombed with dugouts. Turning a back-country town into the national capital had of course swamped accommodation. But when the Government insisted that only essential persons should remain, there was safety-room for all.

Was life uncomfortable as well as dangerous? Well, free China had enough food, if only barely enough, but the difficulty was to transport it to where it was needed. Plane-space from India and lorry-space from Russia—the only two means of ingress—were so precious that not even medical supplies or spare parts were allowed. Consequently machinery kept deteriorating, held together by wire and ingenuity. Then the value of money was decreasing—but steadily, about 10 per cent per month, not run-away as in Germany after the last war where each tram journey cost more than the last. Farmers whose mortgages were thus fading away, and who in any case



Spencer Digby photograph  
**HARRY SILCOCK**  
*"There is always a need"*

lived on the land, were not badly off. Nor were bottom workers or top administrators, who both could ask for more from time to time. But the rank and file of civil servants, teachers and so on, were badly hit.

#### Politics

From inflation to politics is not far. What could Mr. Silcock tell us about the tension between Communists and Government parties within the national alliance?

"Just this, that the practical top men pull together much better than the politicians lower down. I remember, for example, being told by a friend, a member of the People's Political Council, how that body seemed about to freeze out the Communists altogether, when Chiang Kai Shek himself arrived and addressed them. After his speech they voted almost unanimously for continued co-operation."

"And is a new China really growing up in the West out of Japanese reach?"

"Well, it is 36 years since I went to

Szechwan, which is the Province Chungking is situated in, to serve as Dean of Education and later Vice-Principal in the University which various religious bodies, including our own, had just launched at Chengtu. This great basin inside the mountains, with the area of Germany and much the same population, was then incredibly remote. After the first 1000 miles up the Yangtze you took a month at the end of a tow-rope plus several weeks to creep through the 400 miles of gorges. And there was no other way in. Our University was one of two catering to some 100,000,000 people. The other was 700 miles away. The local people looked on the rest of China as foreigners and the Government was independent in everything but name. Even in 1919, when I was asked in Shanghai to give a sort of travel-talk about Szechwan, I found that I, a European, was the only one among the audience of Chinese who had ever been there."

"And to-day?"

"You have all heard how the Chinese have trekked out as the Japanese have come in. There may be up to 60 million such refugees in these new areas. Whole Universities, students and staff, have migrated with their libraries on their backs. And half China's factories—not that there were ever more than a few thousand altogether—have been reassembled in caves and villages in the West. The missionaries who pioneered the back of beyond 20 years before my time with churches, hospitals, schools, printing-presses, and co-operatives did not know it—but they were laying foundations for a second start for the Chinese Republic."

#### Under the Japanese

"Have you been inside Japanese-held areas, Mr. Silcock?"

"Inside—yes; but in—no. I mean I was in Shanghai during the period when the International Settlement remained a Chinese-French-British-American island inside Japanese-occupied suburbs. Our 'Friends' Centre' there was doing its

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