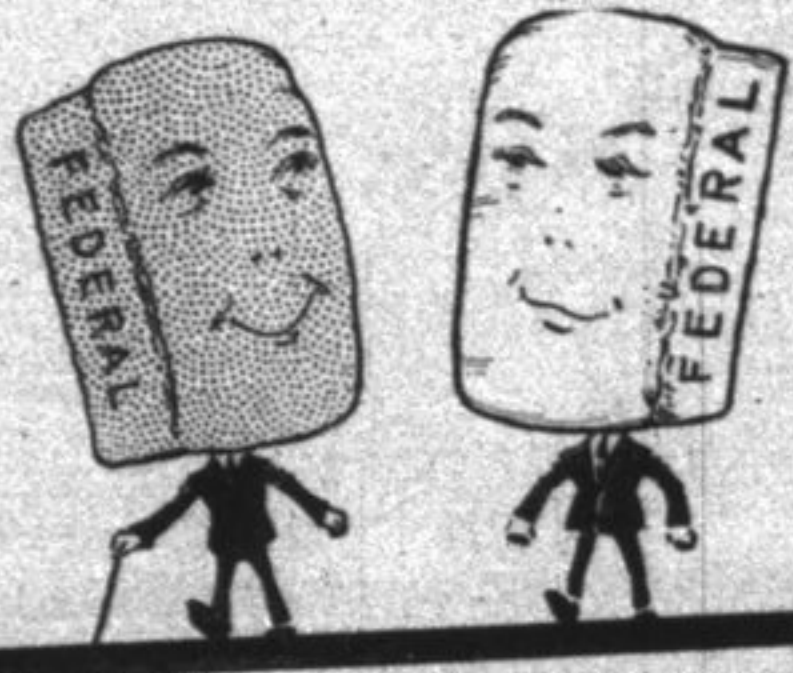


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GENERAL CONDITION OF AFFAIRS IN CHINA

TOLD BY DR. WOLCOTT
Need For More Adequate Red Cross Service in That Country. Visit Governor Chao Heng-li

Changsha, December 30, 1921. Tomorrow will be the last day of the old year and we have not yet secured our passage home, although we made application for it weeks ago. All homeward bound ships seem to be crowded, and although we are willing to take anything that offers, so long as it gets us back to America, we have not yet been notified of any vacancy. If we do not hear something definite within a few days I shall have to go to Shanghai and see what can be done about it.

We had a happy Christmas here at home with the children. There was a Christmas tree with lights and toys and all the familiar rejoicings, and across the river at our mission church there were Christmas services and decorations, holly and greens and queer Chinese emblems, and the tree for the children and the bright little Chinese faces and the dear old carols, but notwithstanding all this it was a Christmas in a strange land and more than I can tell you I missed the dear familiar faces and our own beautiful church, and I was with you all in spirit and tried to enter into your services and reckoned the hours which separate us. When we were celebrating our early morning Christmas Eucharist you were in the midst of the children's Christmas Eve festival at 4 o'clock, for we are about fourteen hours ahead of Chicago here in China where the day begins fourteen hours before it does with you. It is mid-morning on Friday here now, but you are eating your Thursday evening dinners.

Yesterday was a perfect autumnal day, the sky was cloudless and the sun so warm that we sat with open doors. We have had no frost as yet and the gardens are full of green growing things. I wish you could see some of these Chinese vegetable gardens of which there are so many hereabouts, every plant flourishing as though it were a precious thing, every row straight, every inch of ground made the most of and not a weed to be seen anywhere. The Chinese are wonderful gardeners and one crop follows close upon another so that their plots are always green. There is very little frost here, but at this season there is much damp, chilly weather, so that we sit about the fire and wrap in warm coats when we go out of doors, but the Chinese have no fires in their houses, except little charcoal fires for cooking, and none in their shops, churches and schools. Their clothing is of cotton, or for the well-to-do, of silk, but they wear their coats padded with cotton, wool or lined with furs and they pile coat on coat until they look like puff-balls, especially the children, but the coolies and the beggars, whose name is legion, go about bare-footed and with scanty rags covering their nakedness.

These beggars are for the most part pitiful objects, blind and halt, and maimed, and dirty and ragged and unkempt beyond description. They go about in parties with their rice bowls asking alms of the shopkeepers and I nearly started a riot the other day by giving a few coppers to some particularly needy looking old creatures at the door of a shop, before I knew it the street was blocked with a crowd of these mendicants pressing upon me and I had to retreat to the back of the shop when my coppers were all gone, until the shopkeepers drove them away. I saw one of these poor creatures lying dead upon the Bund yesterday, somebody had spread a dirty cloth over his face, but the hucksters not ten feet away went on with their trading and the crowd surged along paying no attention to the sordid tragedy, but before long the agents of the Chinese Misericordia guild came and removed the body for burial. There are several such societies here in Changsha which care for the sick and bury the dead, but they can do but little to cope with the misery which prevails in a bad time, such as this.

The rice crop is much below the average about here this season and in addition to that, there is severe though desultory fighting between the Hunan soldiers and a disorganized Kiang-si army twenty or thirty miles to the east of us, these soldiers are practically bandits and they have looted and ravaged the towns and villages over a large region and have reduced the inhabitants to beggary, these people coming into the city to escape starvation. I saw a lot of them yesterday, some respectable looking women with little children, very different to the usual professional beggars. They sleep in doorways or under straw mats against the shelter of a wall and the men hunt jobs carrying burdens or unloading cargo junks for a few coppers a day. Today it is raining and I am thinking of these poor creatures. "God help the poor" rises to one's lips oftener here in China than anywhere else in the world.

I went to the Red Cross hospital yesterday where a great many of the wounded soldiers and bandits are being cared for. It is not a cheerful place. The hospital is an old official's yamen, with cold stone flagged courts and open galleries and none of the

comforts of a hospital at home, but it is so crowded that some neighboring Chinese houses have been taken, colder and more comfortless than the others and here, with the most meagre equipment possible, these severely wounded men are cared for.

It gives one a new vision of the work of the Red Cross, here with scanty funds and almost no proper equipment they are doing their best to stem this tide of misery.

I went with a friend yesterday to call on the Governor of Hunan and the Commander in chief of the Hunanese army, which has been reduced rather recently from ninety thousand to about fifty thousand men, at that there are too many of them and they are except certain picked regiments all, "shock troops," months in arrears as to their pay, but they remain in the ranks because they are sure of rice and clothing and shelter, not to speak of occasional opportunities of looting, whereas if they left the service they would have to work, and work is not easy to get nor to their taste, or else turn bandits, which is what most of them do.

The bandits however, generally operate in the country districts for they get short shrift in Changsha. I saw a squad of soldiers yesterday patrolling the streets, their leaders carrying rods for the unruly and beheading swords for criminals and bearing aloft the ceremonial arrow which attests that the officer has authority to administer summary justice without the formality of a court martial, more than a few heads have rolled in the mud of the street recently when evil doers have been taken, red handed.

The governor, Chao Heng-to, is a quiet soft spoken man of middle age who received us politely and talked with us freely of the political situation in China. He is a man who assumes few of the trapping and airs of state and is simple and almost ascetic in his personal habits and yesterday he sipped hot water while we were served tea. His yamen is full of soldiers and one has to pass many pairs of sentries before coming to the reception room, it is not easy to arrange an audience, but my friend with whom I went is a man of importance, who is passed into the palace with few formalities.

I have met the governor several times and once had luncheon with him. He seems a modest sensible man and humane as well, but as I sat talking with him yesterday I recalled how on Christmas eve a year ago he sent his soldiers and dragged from their beds a number of his enemies who were plotting against him and caused them to be beheaded in front of their own doors, since that time his authority has not been disputed, but he is the mildest mannered man that ever sacked a city or condemned an enemy to death.

Faithfully,
P. C. Wolcott
P. S. Since writing this today, twenty one letters from home came in a single mail all bearing dates between Nov. 17 and Dec. 4. The last coming in unusually quick time by the S. S. "Empress of Asia." Please express our thanks to all our friends for their affectionate messages, which are greatly appreciated. —P. C. W.

Working rules being considered in many industries and looting rules also seem to need equal attention.



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