

In Retrospect

IT is customary at this season, when the old year is soon to give place to the new, to take stock of the past year's accomplishments, its triumphs and discouragements, its hopes and failures.

For China, the year 1938 has been an extraordinary one, different from any other year in her long history, in that from beginning to end it has been a year of war,—war in its most brutal form with a modernly armed and equipped enemy, who with all the resources at its power has been ruthlessly attempting to reduce this country and its people to a state of vassalage.

Yet this past year, with all the indescribable sufferings which it has brought upon the helpless population of China, with all the terrible destruction that has been wrought throughout the length and breadth of the country, has been a momentous one in the history of our race, for it marks the rebirth of the nation, the consummation of the great Chinese revolution and the beginning of a new and glorious future for our people.

Twelve months ago, as we stood on the threshold of a new year, there were few who dared venture to guess as to what the future held in store for us. Fear and apprehension were in the hearts of everyone. The dauntless stand made by China's gallant defenders at Shanghai had at last given way before the unceasing onslaught of bombs and naval batteries. On November 12, the Chinese army had retreated from Shanghai after three months of the bitterest fighting during which they had exacted the highest price from the enemy for every inch of territory yielded. From Shanghai to Nanking, the debacle was complete. The Chinese line at Soochow, Wusih and all along the line simply fell to pieces. In exactly a month, Nanking, China's capital, had fallen, to be followed by an orgy of massacre, rape and looting unheard of in modern times. A virtual reign of terror pervaded the entire countryside, as Japanese soldiers, casting aside all discipline, ran wild and killed, burned, raped at will. Everything seemed lost. The Chinese army, after its showing at Nanking, seemed completely shattered. The government seemed to have lost its nerve and national morale was at its lowest ebb. There were murmurings of a dictated peace, a peace that would hold China in enslavement for generations to come. Furthermore, the Brussels Conference had failed to do anything for China, who seemed now deserted even by her friends. It was under such auspices that the new year was ushered in.

The story of the year 1938 is the epic story of how the Chinese nation, sick at heart and almost crushed in spirit fought its way back to regeneration, reconstructed its entire national life to suit the wartime situation, and built up strong new armies which have robbed the enemy of any hope of a victory.

The first few months were heart-breaking. Morale was low and everything looked black. But China's leaders and her people knew deep down in their hearts that to surrender now would mean the end of the Chinese race. It would mean enslavement for themselves and for their children and their children's children for generations to come. With a courage and a determination unparalleled in the history of the nation, they set about quietly to put their house in order, to bring organization where before there had been only disorganization, to develop in the vast hinterland, beyond the reach of the enemy's warships and armies, the immense resources which had hitherto been untapped, but which were rich enough to build a new self-dependent nation with all that was necessary to carry on a long war of resistance. Above all, the whole nation must pull together as a man, and to this end, political parties of every creed and color decided to sink their erstwhile differences and bitter enmities in order to form a united front against Japanese aggression. This decision was perhaps the most momentous ever taken since the launching of the national revolution in 1911, since, for the first time in many years civil strife, which had been tearing the country apart for so long, had at last come to an end. At the same time, the scattered armies were regathered together and reorganized. New recruits were enlisted and the government set about the serious task of training a huge new army in the interior provinces who would soon be able to fill the ranks to take the place of their fallen comrades. The new capital was set up at Hankow and officials devoted themselves tirelessly to the tasks before them.

At first the work was all uphill pulling, but the nation as a whole responded magnificently to the clarion call to a long war of resistance. They were not promised rosy victories, but only sacrifice and still more sacrifice in order to carry on the fight to the end, wherein lay China's only hope of salvation. The people knew what was before them, but they preferred death and suffering to slavery. Men and women of wealth and intellect deserted their life of ease in the coastal cities to make the long trek to the interior to build up new schools, new factories, found new enterprises, open up the rich uncultivated lands, that would form the backbone of the new nation. The flower of youth of the country answered their country's call to arms and within a short time a new army, far different from the former mercenary armies of the past and fired with a glorious patriotism, was in the making.

The Japanese had by this time gathered their forces for a drive on Hsuechow, strategic railway town at the junction of the Peiping-Hankow and Tientsin-Pukow railways. But the Japanese, flushed with their easy victory at Nanking, were to receive the surprise of their lives at the new resistance which was to meet them. They boasted that the capture of Hsuechow would be a simple

matter for them. It would take them a few weeks at most and they would deliver a smashing blow to China's forces, which would bring the war to an end with an overwhelming victory for Japan. But they had not counted on the revived spirit of the Chinese troops and the people behind the lines. Week after week passed, until the weeks began to grow into months, but still the Japanese could make no headway. Then suddenly the world was electrified with the news of a smashing Chinese victory at Taierchwang, where a severe blow was dealt to the invading Japanese forces. It took the Japanese some little time to rush huge reinforcements to the spot to recover their lost prestige and it was more than a month more before Hsueh finally fell into their hands. But Hsueh for Japan was but a hollow victory. What they gained was but the empty shell of a once prosperous town. The Chinese forces, which, they had boasted, they would annihilate had by clever manoeuvring executed a strategic withdrawal preserving their main forces intact.

Both sides formed new lines and began taking up positions for the next great offensive, which was to be made on Hankow. The Chinese success at Taierchwang and Hsueh had inspired new confidence in the people and they set themselves with a will to the new tasks ahead. Hankow would eventually fall into Japanese hands, they said, but only after Japan had been made to pay the price. The Chinese kept their word and the long arduous fight for Hankow, which the Japanese were to undertake, was to last five months. Only after the most elaborate preparations and the calling up of more and still more Japanese reinforcements again and again did they finally gain their objective.

But before the fall of Hankow, which had long been expected and was already overdue, a heavy blow fell upon China in the form of the sudden and unexpected Japanese attack on Kwangtung. The provincial authorities were completely taken by surprise and within the space of a few days Canton fell on October 22nd. The blow was one that might have been fatal had not the past year of war hardened the people against such bitter disappointments. Japanese propaganda attempted to undermine the morale of the people by spreading rumors that "silver bullets" had been used and that the people had been betrayed by their leaders. But, although the shock was a terrible one, the people remained calm and resisted more emphatically than ever any hint that peace should be sought.

Within a week came the news of the strategic withdrawal of the Chinese government and army from Hankow, a movement which was executed with consummate skill, leaving only a "scorched earth" behind for the invader. This event, though long expected, might have shattered the morale of the people coming so soon after the tragic news of the fall of Canton. Strangely enough, it had the opposite effect, for the people realized that China was still a master of her destiny and that in the vast hinterland to which the government and the military forces had now

retired and securely entrenched themselves lay China's future hope and destiny. The invading army would now be forced to fight on ground of China's choosing with every disadvantage on their side, since neither their warships nor mechanized units would avail them on the new terrain. The very idea of peace with Japan was scorned. China was more confident than ever of her ultimate victory.

During all this time Japan had been using every device within her means to reap for herself whatever fruits of victory upon which she could lay her hands. She had failed to smash the power of General Chiang Kai-shek's army. She held little more than the few important railway lines and large cities, while the growing strength of the Chinese guerillas, who had completely taken charge of the countryside, had even rendered that hold precarious. But Japan was determined to take what she could and, in addition to seizing Chinese owned mills, factories, mines and other enterprises, she also has been taking over the interests of foreign powers. After the fall of Hankow, she made it clear that she wanted China for her own private exploitation. The foreign powers were asked to recognize the "new situation" and politely withdraw from the scene. But the foreign powers, while being willing to be patient in the past, decided that patience was being wasted on Japan, who interpreted conciliation as weakness. They are now beginning to take action on their own account and at long last the United States and Great Britain, realizing that China has gallantly fought for her freedom and that in a free China alone is there hope of the continuation of foreign rights in China, have decided to extend credits to help her. This has greatly heartened the people, who see in the sympathy of the foreign powers, not only that other countries are beginning to see the justice of their cause but a confirmation of their belief that only by relying upon their own strength would other countries finally realize that she was worth helping.

The puppets whom Japan has set up during the past year in the various governments of her own making have been a complete failure. This has been due to the fact that no self-respecting Chinese is willing to be made a tool of an enemy that kills and maims women and children in the name of "friendship", nor are the masses of the people willing to give their allegiance to any so craven as to serve such masters.

And so as the year 1938 draws to a close, we see the Chinese people confident of their future and of their ultimate victory, confident with an assurance born of self-reliance, knowing that in their own strength lies their ultimate salvation. They know that their task is far from being done and that even greater efforts and greater sacrifices will be demanded of them for a long time to come, but for that they care nothing. Any sacrifice, any suffering will be worth while now, for they know that no matter what happens hereafter China can never be beaten, can never be enslaved.