

## A Student Church in Kunming

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**T**HE student migration to the West is one of the most stirring episodes of the present struggle in China. It has its romantic and picturesque side even to those who have taken part in it. In the days when most of the students known to Christians lived in spacious campuses on the outskirts of China's great cities it was fashionable to regard them as the rather troublesome gilded youth of the country, whose spiritual horizon was an American or European Ph.D. rather than the welfare of their own hinterland. But the war has removed that stigma. The cheerful courage and adaptability of students accustomed to pleasant surroundings has shown that they are quite ready to share the hardships of their countrymen. Almost everyone you meet in Kunming has some adventures to recall about the journey here. Some of the Students from the South-West Associated Universities have special characters on their shirts to commemorate their "long march" from Changsha in the Spring of 1938. Others had a harder and less organised journey after the fall of Canton, retreating with the troops to the north of Kwangtung, and then by various stages making their way through Kwangsi and Kweichow. A number of students have come down from Peiping this summer, running the gauntlet of Japanese inquiries, and coming away with anxious hearts for their families and friends some of whom they know to have been arrested. Others, mostly graduates and business people who have been here longer have memories of the exodus from Nanking in 1937; and some students from Manchuria have completely lost touch with their homes for several years.

Kunming is fortunate in the number of old temples and halls which were at the disposal of the students, and the immigration has meant a contrast of old and new, even more striking than is usual in China. The machine-shops from Tsing Hwa, now part of the South West Associated Universities have planted themselves in the "Flower Temple" where the old gods look down on the lathes and engines, and it is difficult to say which party appears less concerned! The students' living quarters certainly provide no monkish solitude though there is more than monastic simplicity. Every dormitory has double-decker beds, and these have to serve as sitting rooms and studies as well, for they are mostly too crowded to allow space for tables. But somehow although the space is so condensed it is still characteristic of students' rooms in most places, a grand muddle of books and clothes and bedding, musical instruments and pictures of Deanna Durbin,—or some more personal acquaintance. True it has its seamy side, not least in the struggle for cleanliness and the war on the "mobile units" which threaten every sleeper in a wooden bed! Meals generally have to be taken standing, for lack of benches; many of the students are underfed. Some have paid the price of these conditions by sickness, and there have been a few fatalities. It is not all fun being a student these days, and standards of study and scholarship are bound to be affected. There is a shortage of

books and instruments, and slow communications make it difficult to keep in touch with recent developments of the university world outside.

These are some of the conditions faced by students and faced by the Christian Church in its ministry to them. From being a remote Provincial Capital with a small University in it, Kunming has become one of the most important university centres in China. Hitherto the Church's life had been largely that of small merchants and shopkeepers and the few professional people who lived here, though it also had its representatives from among the very poor. It was not wholly prepared for the sudden influx which in the year before last has almost turned Kunming into a non-Yunnanese city. The wealthy natives moved out to the country at the time of the first air-raids, while the wealthy and better educated elements from other provinces came in to avoid the far worse bombings which most of them had experienced. Friction between the two groups is inevitable, and may be regarded as part of the birth pangs of China's reborn unity. In every country it has been a hard struggle to shake off provincialism, and no one likes to be reminded too often of the defects of his own home by other people. And the immigrants have often showed themselves no less provincially minded by regarding Yunnan almost as a foreign country whose people and customs they are at a loss to understand. It is the task of the Church to show people that national unity depends on social unity and understanding, and that the gifts of the Spirit are needed here as much as in the field of international relations. There is one attitude among the newcomers which it seems to me, it is particularly the task of Christians to correct; that is that in a few years when the war is over we shall all return to our former homes and leave Yunnan to its former half forgotten concerns. This is not true either in the light of history or of any hopeful interpretation of China's future. Yunnan can no more revert to its former undeveloped state than you can unscramble an egg. The factories and new communications will stay, and so will the thousands of poorer immigrants who have been brought from Hunan to work on the railways. China now has a new coastline whose mountain bulwarks are a far better guard against erosion than the port cities on the east. The parallel between the Pilgrim Fathers and those now who have come from persecution to a new vision of God leading them to the West has been stressed before, but it remains the keynote of every Christian immigrant's conviction that there is a purpose of God in his coming here.

This sense of purpose and opportunity has been felt particularly by the Church in Kunming and by those who have come from outside. The Methodist Church has developed its Sunday Morning English Services and has drawn a large number of students, especially the musically inclined, and by social contacts and that friendly hospitality which is so much appreciated by students away from home, is doing fine Christian work. The China Inland Mission, which has previously almost no experience of student work has also risen to the occasion. In Kunming with a student service and Bible Classes, especially for the students of Tung Chi University from Shanghai (同濟大學) which has a hostel nearby. They have recently started a service

in German for these students, since that is the second language of that University. Some individual work of Bible Classes has also been done by the Friends' Mission, and by the Rev. W. H. Clark of the Church of Christ in China, formerly in Changsha. The Y.M.C.A., and Y.W.C.A., have also had their activities, but they have had to spend most of their time on Student Relief.

From the outside, students were helped in their understanding of the Christian faith for these times by the visit of Dr. T. C. Chao in October, 1938 and in the Spring of 1939 by the Youth and Religion Movement under the leadership of Bishop Song of West China, Dr. Lautenschlager of Cheeloo and Lingnan Universities, Mr. T. H. Sun of the National Christian Council, and Miss Shao Siu Lin of the McTyeire School in Shanghai. Their meetings have been reported elsewhere, but one of their comments on Kunming has special reference to our own work which was started afterwards:

(a) "The local churches have done the most difficult pioneering missionary work in past years, but are now not prepared to meet the situation created by the on-going war. . . . Consequently the churches must work with much greater speed under new leadership in order to keep abreast of the times and meet the needs as well as the challenge.

(b) The university centre of Kunming, has been, is and will be in the west suburb of the city. But there is not a single church in the neighbourhood which can serve the students as well as the faculty and staff members. Therefore a student or youth church in or near the school centre is greatly needed."

Thus it was that I found myself at the end of April, bundling in and out of trains in Indo-China, armed with a couple of harmoniums (or harmonia, which?) a box of Christian literature and the various assortments of boots and biscuits and things which people thrust on you at the last moment for their friends when they hear you are going to Yunnan! Some weeks before, Bishop Hall had been in Kunming, and laid plans for a new Student Church, to be organised by the Chung Hwa Sheng Kung Hui somewhere near the University. They were still looking for sites when I arrived, and after a few weeks we found a place to rent in the narrow cobbled street which leads to the Great West Gate of the city. In normal times it is not a street of much importance, but with the coming of "Lien Ta" (聯大) as the South West Associated Universities are always called, it has become the Latin Quarter of Kunming. There are two student hostels inside the gate, and two outside, while the new mud-brick buildings are sheltering under the North-West city wall. Students were passing by all the time, and although the house we had in mind was unpretentious we went ahead in faith and took it.

It really required some faith at first to see it as anything but a very dirty and unedifying hovel. There is a row of shop fronts facing the street, with a very low roof, and behind that a small Chinese courtyard of which we were taking over three adjacent rooms. Partitions had to be taken down, and ceilings removed, glass put in the windows, the floors levelled and walls whitewashed. These things take time in Kunming and were not made any faster by my

Cantonese upbringing which has given me only the slightest smattering of the National Language! However there were many good friends to help, and gradually the place began to look more like a Church. I thought of St. Francis, and wished that we had reached the stage when we could really forget about the prestige of the educated and the cheapness of labour, and set to build the Church with our own hands. But as yet we were a Church without a body. The students would come when we had a building, but although it was possible to get in touch with them through the good work being done already, the place was the first requirement.

The plan devised by Bishop Hall fitted in very happily with the proposal of Dr. T. C. Chao to spend his sabbatical year from Yenching helping the religious life of students in Kunming. Dr. Chao could not come until July, so my task was to try to start the congregation of which he would have charge for the year. We did not at first have the means or staff to open a very big place, so there was only the one shop front which is used as a reading room, and the Church, consisting of the three rooms behind, joined together. The front room was opened first, and on St. John Baptist's Day June 24th, there was a short retreat of prayer and dedication attended by a number of Chinese and foreign workers among students and young people. The first Sunday Service was held on July 2nd. By that time we had got together a small Church committee consisting of students, graduates, Faculty members, and Y. M. and Y.W.C.A. Secretaries. We were also in touch with about fifty people whom we knew between us. It was the last Sunday in Kunming for Dr. Alexander Watson of our C.M.S. Hospital who was retiring after fifteen years service in Yunnan, so we asked him to be our opening preacher. No one knew how many would come, and we agreed not to expect more than half a dozen. Actually there just under sixty, and that nearly filled our small Church. From that time there has been a regular attendance of forty to sixty each Sunday morning. At the beginning of September, Sunday Evening Services were also begun, and bring almost as many students as in the morning. As we join in worship and thought after an evening meal I am reminded of the late Evening Services at St. Mary's Oxford, and pray that in our small way we may capture and be captured by the Spirit of those times and these. It is perhaps too fanciful to liken our dirty cobbled streets to Oriel Street or New College Lane, but I frequently find myself thinking that the present student conditions, with their quarters under the moss-grown roofs of old courtyards, the student lodgings for those who can afford them, the little restaurants, and the closeness of students to the townsfolk are more like Oxford than the campuses of more prosperous days. It may be that God is leading Chinese education to new standards of sincerity and depth through the new model army of poor scholars whose spirit of sacrifice and humility may equal and surpass the Christian contribution which came from the Universities of medieval Europe. Our aim is to build with God's help a University Church which will integrate and fulfil the life of thought and action which proceeds around it.

The vision is already being made clearer. A strange, unnoticed invasion has been converging on Kunming, which we would like to mention in order to ask for the prayers of friends for its success, though we hardly dare to assert its importance. The advance guard, as mentioned came from Canton. Peiping in the person of Dr. Chao has supplied the main body of attack. Then from Chungking has come a Chinese friend and disciple, a lawyer who became convinced that the understanding of the Christian Faith was the most important thing he could do with his life. From Fukien we have received reinforcements in the shape of Mr. Wu Sheng Teh, graduate of Yenching and till recently on the staff of Westminster College, in Fukien. He travelled overland, and it took him two months to reach Kunming. The fourth of our number is coming from Peiping by way of Hawaii and an Oxford Group meeting in California, Miss Leatrice Huang who is to help specially with the girl students and young married graduates. That is the nucleus of a "team," but we pray that it will be wider than that and that the people who come to the Church will catch the missionary spirit which inspired our fathers to make more hazardous journeys.

Dr. Chao preaches most Sunday mornings, and draws people not only by the charm of his literary style, but by his powerful message of world fulfilling Incarnation and the impact of the "Word made Flesh" on our own generation.

A certain number of Bible study groups, discussion groups, "question hours," have already begun. Dr. Chao has given a series of week night lectures on "Christianity and Chinese Culture," while we keep one evening a week free for visiting speakers on social and international subjects. These have included Professor John Foster of Hwa Chung University on "A Christian with the Eighth Route Army," Dr. Lautenschlager on "Chinese Christian Students and the European War," Dr. Wu Wen Tsao (吳文藻) on "Religion and Anthropology," Mr. King (金龍章) the director of the local cotton factory, on "Social and Industrial Developments in Yunnan," and Mr. P. P. Mao (毛北屏) of the C.I.C. on the "Chinese Industrial Cooperatives."

We are working closely with the Student Y.M. and Y.W. and are helping them organise Christian Unions in the big universities. "Lien Ta" has already started its union, and they also have them in Chung Ching Medical College outside the city, and in the National Sun Yat Sen University in Chengkiang where the splendid spirit of certain faculty members, combined with the co-operation of the C.I.M. helped them to start a very spontaneous Student Church almost as soon as they arrived. Before long we hope that there will also be a Christian Union in Yunnan University and Tung Chi University, so that the ideal of a Kunming "lien," which was put forward at the Summer Conference and the National Delegate Conference, may be realised.

With so many students, and so much need for social welfare, it is fairly easy to do things in a spectacular way, holding big meetings without going very deep. We do not regard our task as one which will get results in big numbers, our purpose is to dig

deep; to find a few men and women who have the firm foundation of a faith, thought out for themselves, purged of the confusion of tongues and doctrines to which the Chinese Church is prone, determined to follow Christ to the end in their own lives and to bring others to Him; and to spread the vision of Christ Incarnate in every walk of life, which is the basis of new leadership for the Church of the next generation.

## Crisis Opportunities

ARCHIE R. CROUCH

**W**E were walking over to inspect repair work on the village chapel. I asked the principal of Riverbend Christian Middle School to name some of the new opportunities opened to the school since it had taken refuge in the country. He had a hard time getting very far on that topic although he did mention Christian services in the chapel the school was enlarging and clinical aid to the country folks offered by the school clinic. When I asked for some of the school's most difficult problems the answer came immediately and without reflection. There is the ever present financial problem and also the constant problem of adequate room for sleeping, eating and classroom work. In addition to these problems is that of proper sanitation and hygiene for five hundred men and boys living in country ancestral halls and old temples.

After inspecting the work on the chapel I went for a walk among the villagers harvesting their rice. On the way back to school it occurred to me that what had been mentioned as opportunities were not the greatest opportunities and the problems pointed out were not the real problems.

The school is conducting weekly services in the village chapel, where the same chapel had but intermittent services conducted by travelling preachers before. In addition to this the school is enlarging and renovating the little chapel, which before was hardly better than a stable. But, valuable as this work is, it does not reach very far. The talks of high school boys on religion at best can only be rudimentary, and the average attendance of villagers at the chapel has not increased very much.

The school clinic has been opened to the public since the first few weeks in the country. The man in charge treats an average of fifteen patients daily. But this work is entirely operated by the administration and has very little relationship to the life of the students or the teachers—except that they know it is being done.

The boys of the senior classes also conduct a free school for the underprivileged of the village. They have an enrollment of about seventy, but this is no different than the same work they did in public education before they were forced out of the city. It is a real opportunity for service, but it is not what we can call a new opportunity.