Documents on Nanking

On November 11, when the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the armistice was observed, few newspapers failed to mark the occasion sardonically on the events of the twenty days that followed, and from that period ended with war in Asia, China Custom in Spain, and the fascist states of Europe shaking the mailed fist. Democracy, instead of being safe everywhere, is safe nowhere.

But no satire achieved on the editorial pages could equal that of a little paper-covered book of documents, prepared by H. J. Timbery, China correspondent of the London Daily News, and published in November 11 by the Modern Age Publishing Company of New York City. The volume, entitled "Japanese Terror in China," deals primarily with the capture of Nanking. It includes eyewitness accounts from members of the international committee which had charge of the so-called "safety zone" in Nanking. To release on Armistice Day this record of current brutality was nothing less than devastating to the self-respect of the world.

Nanking's population, 1,000,000 had fled ahead of the army, but 200,000 crowded into the safety zone, and there were twenty-seven white men (eighteen Americans, five Germans, one Englishman, one Austrian and two Russians) tried to look after them. The Chinese army collapsed and the leaders fled. Dead bodies were piled high in the city gates. The United States gunboat Panay started down the river to its fate. The bombing stopped and on December 14, 1937, Japanese troops were seen moving across a nearby hill.

From this point on we will confine ourselves largely to quotations from the eyewitnesses, and persons lacking strong stomachs should go no further:

I have already described the conditions at the gate—we actually had to drive over masses of corpses to get through... Soldiers were taking all 300 and shooting them without a whimper from the entire throng... That morning the Chinese were among the fiercest of the Japanese. Our men were taken away by soldiers, seven of them from the university library... At our staff conference at four we could hear the shots of the city and the wailing of the wounded.

December 17—A rough estimate would be at least a thousand women raped last night and during the day. Resistance means the bayonet, and bayonets killed and wounded women five times. Some houses are entered five to ten times a day and the poor people look at men as though they were women raped... Went with Sperling to see fifty-four corpses in a building. They were all women... Were they used for saber practice?... Forty-three of the fifty-four employees of the power company were taken away. A man was led to headquarters with his hands bound, and his story was that he was one of a gang of some hundred who had been tied together, then gasmed and thrown over and set afire... A walk of Nanking's street scene made early in January was witness to a systematic or quieted down somewhat indicated 40,000 new-made graves... A member of the safety zone who got out the city gate and penetrated the countryside for 20 miles did not see a single Chinese or a single farmer animal. Just desolation.

The reader turns down the book with the conviction that the Japanese army, lacking a background of Christian idealism, is using western weapons with a ruthlessness and brutality which the West cannot yet envisage.