

Chapter Twenty-seven

ANCIENTS OF THE EARTH



NEW and different places, strange countries, peoples, and faces have always appealed to me. I did not have to be in London for the Fifth International Conference until July. When I had secured my Chinese visa it had occurred to me that it might be much better to go on around the world than retrace my steps.

On a misty day, the sun not bright enough to clear the sky completely, we sailed from Kobe through the glorious Inland Sea, threaded its innumerable islets, like the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence, only more delicate. The boat was small and out-of-date. A few of the English had chairs but Grant and I wandered between crates of ducks, chickens, and livestock, and hundreds of Japanese squatting stolidly on the deck. When we emerged into the Yellow Sea it became very foggy and Grant was sick to his toes. I put on a brave face and ate, though with long teeth, as the old phrase goes.

We landed at Fusan one evening. Koreans stood about in their white robes which fell to their ankles, pale figures outlined against the night in the subdued light of their mysterious paper lanterns. The next morning as I glanced out over the countryside on the way to Seoul it appeared an Oriental desert, odd but seemingly familiar. I felt at home within its gates. White-robed coolies smoking long thin pipes with minute bowls drove oxen, worked in the fields. They had North American Indian faces, uncut, ragged hair, reddish skins, and

curious, wooden structures strapped to their backs to carry burdens of any kind—soil, coal, rocks

The streets of Seoul were broad, dimly lit The tall Korean men were unique, a combination of priest, patriarch, and grandee, so formal and elegant with their pointed beards a trifle larger than Van Dykes They were utterly indifferent to other people, managing to preserve a proud and aloof air in spite of their idiotic, silly-looking hats, dinky-crowned and wide-brimmed, from which hung strings of amber beads, valuable family heirlooms

I wondered again at the universal white costumes Everywhere on the banks of rivers women were eternally pounding laundry, you could almost feel the threads parting company with the terrific beating—washing with stones and ironing with sticks

The Korean was held in contempt by the Japanese, who declared his Government had built schools, roads, railroads, brought cleanliness It was true that the houses of the Koreans were not so well-kept, their habits not so sanitary, but they were a separate race, and they accepted scouring and scrubbing and sweeping only under pressure Hatred and rebellion had been the result of denying them their language and customs They claimed they were taxed out of existence to pay for such luxuries, and nourished antagonism and stubborn resistance against anything Japanese They maintained further that they had no personal liberty, even being required to have passports to move about in their own country

Koreans also resented the speeding-up-of-production in the silk factories through the exploitation of little girls I saw them there, shoulders bent, crouched up over their work, hair braided down their backs, they were almost like babies Their job was to put their tender, delicate fingers into boiling water to pull out the silk cocoons—the hands of older people were not sensitive enough But the Japanese said they did not feel the pain

Even though I had a large luncheon meeting attended by foreign missionaries and officials, Korea was but a stepping stone to China The Celestial Kingdom had an indefinable odor of its own, peculiar and imitable, which waxed and waned, varying with each city and with each district of a city It might be a compound of sauces, onions,

garlic, incense, opium, and charcoal, but who has ever succeeded in putting an odor into words? It marched upon you, at first faintly and indistinctly like a distant army, and then closed in relentlessly, associating itself with memories, making you gasp in protest or pleasure

At Peking I wanted to change into fresh clothes all the time I was haunted by dust—dust in my body, in my ears, up my nose, down my throat, between my teeth Some of the streets were paved, but the dust was suffocating After every sight-seeing sortie I bathed and bathed and bathed in a desperate effort to rid myself of the diabolical dust

We were seven days viewing palaces, native quarters, night life, sing-song girls, hospitals, factories, silk mills We heard the mechanical chanting and beating of drums by Buddhist priests, mostly young boys dressed in soiled yellow robes, gazed with amazement at the funeral processions—great floats, fantastic gods, food, flowers, possessions, visited old Chinese gardens and museums I shopped for jade and lapis lazuli and was well cheated

Beggars, many of them crippled and on crutches, were hobbling along in the gutters or sitting on corners, gaunt and filthy Children were turning handsprings, doing anything to attract your attention, they edged beside you, and you had the feeling they had been born with palms upward

You could not set foot out of doors without being besieged by ricksha boys clothed only in scant, cotton trousers and jackets, always short at ankles and wrists The moment you stepped in they picked up the shafts of their little vehicles and began the dogtrot journey I could not become accustomed to the eager running of these half-naked creatures, so weak, so underfed, so much less able than the rest of us It had been bad enough in Japan, but there you felt the runners were sturdy, in China they usually were suffering from varicose veins, heart disease, and, forever, hunger Often, as the wind blew some of the rags and tatters aside, I saw pock marks and wondered how close we were to the manifold diseases of the Orient

I was going about a good deal and it worried me to be pulled around by a human being so emaciated One morning our regular boy

was missing. Another replaced him, cheery and smiling. Three days later the first returned. He had been sick, he said, he had had small-pox. The scabs had not yet peeled off.

I spoke to the doorman at the hotel, who managed the rickshas. "This boy is not well enough to work."

"Oh, yes, he's used to it. He feels a little bad, but he's all right."

Nevertheless, I sent him home to rest up. Nothing save famine and pestilence and plague seemed to give the Chinese any breathing spell. It was said the average ricksha coolie lasted but four or five years—the remainder of his life he merely subsisted. I was submerged in a strange despondency and questioned "the oldest civilization in the world" which still, after so many thousand years, permitted this barbarism.

Grant rode a donkey when we went to the Ming tombs, and the guide did also. I was carried in a chair for miles and miles through an arid, dusty plain. Two coolies held the lengthy bamboo poles on their shoulders and a third jogged alongside waiting to take his turn. I felt so sorry for them I wanted to get out and walk. I wished I could carry myself. All the way these poor, starved creatures made animal noises, "Aah-huh, aah-huh," nasal, interminable, varying the tone but slightly, even their words sounded like grunts to me.

China was not yet past the story-telling age, as you saw in the theater, where someone recited the news from the stage, for a copper anybody could hear what was going on in the world. The ancient classical forms of the Chinese language were intelligible to scholars alone, and Dr. Hu-Shih had been instrumental in devising a literary vernacular which the people could use. This philosopher who at three years old had been familiar with eight hundred characters, now in 1922, while only in his late twenties, was already reputed to be the initiator of the Chinese Renaissance. He asked whether I would speak to the students of the Peking National University and, though he was to act as chairman, volunteered also to interpret, which I esteemed an almost unheard-of honor. His outlook, coinciding with mine, recognized what birth control might mean for civilization.

Dr. Tsai Yuen-Pei, the Chancellor of the University and a leader of the anti-Christian movement, had gathered into his fold the most brilliant students of Young China, all of them bubbling over with

interest at Western ideas, which were sweeping the globe. A great turmoil was going on in their lives and a revolt against rigid Chinese tradition.

Due to the translation difficulties I had encountered in Japan, I had decided I could not afford to speak in China unless I went over the subject first with my interpreter and knew he understood the spirit as well as the words. Therefore I showed Dr. Hu-Shih my lecture material in advance. He suggested, "These students will want to know everything about contraception as it is practiced."

"But I've never given that except at medical meetings."

"China is different from the West. Here you may discuss contraception as an educational fact as well as a social measure. You will be listened to respectfully, laughed at if you do not, and will surely be asked for definite information. I think you should prepare yourself for this."

It was not simple to digress from principles and theories and go into methods that needed diagrams and technical knowledge to secure understanding, and I felt diffident about following his advice. But these young people, responsive and alert, received my first practical lecture with earnest attention. Dr. Hu-Shih translated accurately and quickly, interjecting amusing stories and improving, I imagine, upon my own words.

Afterwards he and I were escorted across the campus to the home of Dr. Tsai. I have always been interested in foreign foods. I like to try them out, and have brought home dozens of Hawaiian, Chinese, Indian, Japanese recipes which can be made at home. This dinner was an Arabian Nights experience. It began at seven and lasted until one in the morning—bird's-nest and quail egg soup, fried garoupa, ducks' tongues and snow fungus, roast pheasant, rice and congee, lotus nuts and pastry, sharks' fins, and various kinds of wine.

There must have been well over thirty guests invited for the evening, among them an American woman, Mrs. Grover Clark, whose husband was on the faculty of the University. Some of the students had been to her between the lecture and dinner time and given her the transcribed notes which they had taken down in shorthand. Would she correct them? They wanted to get the information published. When they came to the Chancellor's home to call for them so

that they could deliver them to the press, I could see at a glance that this was not at all what I desired to leave behind me, my spoken words never sound adequate or complete in print. Therefore, I sent a boy to the hotel for a copy of the old stand-by, *Family Limitation*. The students set to work at once to translate it. Mrs. Clark offered to pay the expenses, and the next afternoon five thousand copies were ready for circulation.

This little incident was significant of Young China, an idea to them was useless if only in the head. Their motto was to put it into concrete reality.

Symptomatic also of new China was the abandonment of bound feet, although women of advanced years still were to be seen leaning on each other for support as they tottered by. Amahs were carrying nurselings about when they themselves seemed scarcely able to stand up. However, I was glad to see only a few of the small children had these lily feet. Fathers realized their daughters could not earn a living if thus deformed. At the Peking Union Medical College, combining the modern equipment of the Occident with the artistry and traditions of the Orient, no girl was accepted for training unless her feet were normal.

One day Dr. Hu-Shih asked me to lunch in an old Manchu restaurant where his friends were accustomed to gather and ponder. Many were business or professional men, but all, with their little beards and intellectual faces, had the appearance of professors. It was an unusual combination of Wall Street and university. In our private dining room were seven English-speaking Chinese with families of from four to nine children. Each said the later ones had not been wanted, nevertheless they had come.

The conversation took a scientific turn. Since man had through breeding brought about such changes in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, why could he not produce a class of human beings unable to procreate? Was there any reason why the particular biological factors that made the mule sterile could not be applied further? They discussed the interesting possibility of creating a neuter gender such as the workers in a beehive or ant hill.

The implications of this colloquy formed a fascinating climax to our sojourn in Peking. Our train was the last one south for several

days Soldiers cluttered the landscape—not alert or even military-looking, but men or boys put into uniform and told how to act The Tuchuns were all trying to “unite” China, each in his own way We read in the papers about the war clouds hanging over the country, but nobody seemed to be excited We were not worried, being foreigners, we were assured, meant protection

The valley of the Yangtze Kiang was green and luxuriant, every inch of ground was being utilized Even space which should have been employed for roads was given over to food production, and thousands of people were born, lived, and died in boats on the river Some water buffalo waded in the mud of the rice fields, some horses worked the water treadmills, but human labor predominated Overpopulation and destitution went hand in hand In this land which Marco Polo once described as “a pleasant haven of silks, spices, and fine manners,” all the hypothetical Malthusian bogeys had come true

Foreigners at the International and French Settlements of Shanghai enjoyed much the same life as at home Their hotels were the same, they met the same sort of people, dressed in the same clothes, ate the same meals, in fact, it was difficult to get Chinese food unless you knew exactly where to go They came in droves, herded together, most of them bored to death You could see they had appropriated the best of everything—the houses with gardens and walls, the clean rickshas, the well-fed boys, the prosperity The Chinese, in their own country, lived on what was left, which was practically nothing They huddled wistfully on the fringes—horrible, abject, dirty

It amazed me to see that Americans, French, and English could be so near and yet close their eyes to the wretched, degrading conditions of devastating squalor in the native quarters Once while a missionary was guiding me through the Chinese City, we noted a crowd, children included, gathered in curiosity around a leper woman She was on the ground, sighing and breathing heavily Nobody offered to help her “Maybe she’s dying,” said my companion Just then the woman gave a fearful groan and took a baby from under her rags She knew what to do, manipulated her thighs and abdomen, got the afterbirth, bit the cord with her teeth, put the baby aside, turned over, and rested No trace of emotion showed on the faces of the watchers

In their respective countries Europeans would have made an effort

to improve such conditions. But here they seemed to have lost many of their former standards and qualities of character and conscience. It was said that China, psychologically speaking, swallowed up the morals of all those who came to reside there.

One young American secretary related to me the joys of living in this section of the Orient. She said her salary was far smaller than any she would have received in the United States, but her comfort, on the other hand, far exceeded what she could have had in Boston at double her present wages. Among them she mentioned her ricksha boy, who cost her only five dollars a month, out of which he had to support himself and his enormous family. During the three years he had been working for her she had never raised his pay, nor did she ever expect to. He dared make no request, because in China it was almost impossible to get a job by one's self. When a servant was dismissed he faced practical starvation. I really formed a bad impression of people who wanted to live in China because of the cheapness of its luxuries.

The Grand Hotel was elegantly appointed, but the boys who served in the rooms did not seem friendly in their hearts towards any foreigners. Hostility was percolating throughout the country. Deep in the Chinese mind lay the memory of many invasions, of the Boxer Rebellion, and the intrusion of business men and, particularly, missionaries.

In Shanghai the American missionaries dominated Chinese education, such as it was. I was surprised to find families of eight or ten children the rule rather than the exception among them. Their salaries were raised with each new infant, and that may have been the reason. Nevertheless, there were many who wanted birth control information. When they learned of my presence they called on the telephone, sent cards, came to see me. But, apparently apprehensive of criticism, they took me if possible into a secluded room or, if we had to meet in a public place, backed me into a corner and stood in front to conceal the fact they were talking with me, they acted as though they were turning up their coat collars so that they should not be recognized.

The only method of family limitation known to the poor Chinese was infanticide of girl babies by suffocation or drowning. The mis-

sionaries were co-operating with the Government, which had enacted a law forbidding the practice. They went from home to home to see whether any woman were pregnant. If one were obviously so, her name was jotted down in a notebook for a call soon after birth was due. At the same time both father and mother were informed of the severe penalty they would incur unless the baby itself or a doctor's certificate of death from natural causes were produced. After two years' work ninety-five percent of pregnant mothers showed either their babies or good reasons for not doing so.

But the Chinese had so low a margin of subsistence that, if the law forbade them to dispose of one child, another was starved out. Sometimes two little girls had to be sold to keep one boy alive, in dire necessity even he might have to be parted with to some sonless man who wanted to ensure ancestor worship. Because the elder girls could begin to help in the fields or become servants in some rich landowner's household, usually it was the three- and four-year-olds who were turned over to brothels. There they stayed until mature enough to be set to working out their indenture. If they ever tried unsuccessfully to find freedom, the proprietors might beat them unmercifully, sometimes even breaking their legs so that they could not walk, much less ever run away again.

When infanticide was stopped, the corresponding increase in sing-song girls making their living by prostitution was almost immediately evident. It was estimated Shanghai had a hundred thousand. Many were Eurasians, the results of unions with white men who were in Shanghai on small salaries as representatives of foreign business firms. I glimpsed some of the Chinese women who had been bought as housekeepers and mistresses as well saying good-by at the train to their American or English masters summoned home.

Desiring to see the worst of the city I went to the prostitute quarter in company with Mr. Blackstone, a missionary from the Door of Hope, a house of refuge for escaping girls. In Shanghai, as in Tokyo, we found in the Japanese section soft, low lights and an undercurrent of music in the air. The inmates were fully grown, gay and hearty, the interiors were immaculate and restrained in their decoration, the streets were swarming with sailors who apparently preferred this district to the depressingly dark and gloomy Chinese one near by.

Here and there the Chinese prostitutes could be seen through the open doorways, heavily rouged, gowned in vivid colors, limned like posters against the meanness of the background, their frail, slight bodies at the service of anyone who came. Each took her turn upon a stool outside, using her few words of English to attract the sailor trade. I thought I would never recover from the shock of seeing American men spending their evenings at such places with what were obviously children.

In one house we found half a dozen girls looking much younger than their theoretical fifteen seated on hard benches around a room not more than six feet by nine. A little one holding high a lamp so that we should not trip and fall, escorted us to her cubicle, which had only a bed for furniture. A chair was brought in for me.

Mr. Blackstone began to talk to her in her own dialect. Why had she come?

"Too much baby home—no chow." She said she was sixteen and had been there since she was twelve.

"Why she can't be a day over ten," I expostulated.

The child was visibly frightened, aghast at her own loquacity. We might be from the Government. When we had at last gained her confidence, however, she responded eagerly to this unusual sympathetic contact, talking freely about herself—the long time it took to pay herself out, the precariousness and physical fatigue of her calling, some days she had no visitors, but when a ship was in maybe as many as ten or twelve a night. She seemed as old as the ages in her knowledgeable, "No want baby," she told us. Yet her poor little frame had the immaturity of fruit picked green and left to shrivel.

We gave her money and left in spite of her urgent and kind invitation to stay.

All sing-song girls were not necessarily prostitutes, most hotels hired them to entertain guests. Only their lips were made up, their faces remaining pale. They wore flowers in their hair and although not so soft-voiced as the geisha had greater independence. Certainly their weird, shrill songs accompanied by the tinkle of a lute were not attractive to Western ears.

Echoes of my visit to Japan had permeated throughout the colony of Japanese, who aimed to give me an extra-cordial welcome, trying

their best to make up for what they thought had been an unpleasant experience in their country I had not realized the power of ancient feudalism over the Japanese woman until I met her away from home, where she blossomed into an intelligent, outspoken human being I noticed she expressed herself much more frankly in the presence of men, but underneath the conversation I often sensed a propaganda which had resulted in deep prejudice, from the horrible stories you heard of the savagery of the Chinese you received the impression all were cannibals

Since my plans to include China in my itinerary had been made so late, I had few letters of introduction there Consequently, to my regret I did not see many Chinese women I had not expected to do much speaking and had had very little press in Peking Dr Hu-Shih, however, had arranged for me to meet about fifteen newspaper men and women in Shanghai We sipped our tea, nibbled our cakes, and then they began to ask questions, taking down the answers with the utmost care They wanted to set forth the pros and cons of birth control in their own vernacular, but unfortunately could not reach the illiterate masses They asked me to speak at the Family Reformation Association, an organization which was under missionary auspices The rules were no smoking, no drinking, no gambling Its membership, therefore, remained small

The young woman who interpreted paragraph by paragraph had just returned from America, but did not prove the expert her traveling had indicated The chairman said I was to give both theory and practice, but when I came to the latter my translator's courage took flight entirely She whispered, "I'll get a doctor to say that" I gave up and switched to something simpler My audience, however, knew without her assistance what I had been trying to convey, and was much diverted by her predicament

Of all lands China needed knowledge of how to control her numbers, the incessant fertility of her millions spread like a plague Well-wishing foreigners who had gone there with their own moral codes to save her babies from infanticide, her people from pestilence, had actually increased her problem To contribute to famine funds and the support of missions was like trying to sweep back the sea with a broom

China represented the final act in an international tragedy of over-

population, seeming to prove that the eminence of a country could not be measured by numbers any more than by industrial expansion, large standing armies, or invincible navies. If its sons and daughters left for the generations to come a record of immortal poetry, art, and philosophy, then it was a great nation and had attained the only immortality worth striving for. But China, once the fountainhead of wisdom, had been brought to the dust by superabundant breeding.

This was my conclusion when at last we were back again in the modern age on the American ship *Silver State* bound for Hong Kong, we had comfort, hot water, baths, heard the softness of the little chimes as the steward went through the corridors announcing meals. It was almost with a sense of awe that I asked for any service. After being some time in the Orient you were a bit embarrassed by having an American wait on you. Soon, however, the plumbers, the carpenters, the painters who kept the vessel trim, the sailors who swabbed down the decks at night, gave me a feeling that in the Western countries we had gone far towards dignifying manual labor.