

XX

CHINA

DUST, dust, dust! That was my first impression of Peking. We had traveled miles and miles past unlovely and uninteresting dry fields from Mukden. And then there were walls within walls! I could not like it. The thousands of corpse-like coolies were as depressing as they were astounding. The Peking Grand Hotel was elegant, but the boys who came to serve in the rooms were not friendly in their hearts, I felt, to foreigners. I didn't demand it of them, but after the sincere courtesy of the boys in the Japanese hotels, it created a feeling of uneasiness. I felt that I would die before our sojourn of seven days in Peking was to end.

We went to the Temple of Heaven on our first sight-seeing tour. It saddened me to be pulled about by the rickshaw boys. To see them running through the streets, their half-naked bodies covered with rags, all for the few pennies necessary to sustain life, made me ill and sad. The deserted temple and its gardens intensified my depression. At the Forbidden City there was more evidence of life and interest.

I was haunted by a feeling of uncleanness, I wanted to bathe all the time, to change into fresh clothes. The dust suffocated me. The next day we visited the Ming Tombs at Nankow. I was carried for miles and miles by three coolies in a sedan chair through an arid, dusty land, ten miles to the tombs and ten miles back again. These poor, thin creatures trudged all the way. I was submerged in the strange despondency, I questioned the oldest civilization in the world, which after how many thousands of years still permitted this!

But I did respond to my first view of the Great Wall. We came upon it after riding through a treeless mountainous country. The Great Wall seemed to recede from view with a mysterious rhythm. We walked on the top of it for more than a mile to one of its highest peaks. It seemed to be disintegrating rapidly.

Everywhere we found beggars, dirty and ragged. Finally, back to Peking we went, to bathe and bathe and bathe, in a desperate effort to get the diabolical dust out of noses, eyes and throats. My diary for these days reiterates the presence of dust.

Anyone wishing to take the negative side of a debate on the Malthusian theory would do well to avoid an opponent who has taken a trip through China. In this land, which Marco Polo once described as a pleasant haven of silks, spices, and fine manners, all of the Rev. Mr. Malthus's hypothetical bogeys have turned into realities.

The tourist visiting China cannot help being impressed by the fact that overpopulation and destitution go hand in hand. Here one sees millions of people with scarcely clothing enough to cover their naked bodies. One finds, too, that these same millions are eking out a meagre existence and have to work twelve to fourteen hours a day to do even that.

On the way from Mukden to Peking—now Peiping—one was impressed by the fact that every inch of ground was being utilized. While on our trip from Peking to Hankow, and then down the Yangtze River to Nanking on our way to Shanghai, I was impressed by the fact that the land is so

utilized in producing food that the people are compelled to make their habitation in boats upon the water. There are so few roads in China that even that space is taken over for food production, and mile upon mile of great tracts of land is found cultivated for the barest necessities.

As soon as I had recovered from the fatigue of travel I sent my letter of introduction to Dr Hu Shih, and he called in person without delay. Still in his late twenties, Dr Hu Shih represented Oriental intelligence at its best. He had been educated at Cornell and Harvard, spoke English flawlessly, and was in addition one of the most charming gentlemen it has been my good fortune to meet.

The most promising of the young philosophers of China, Dr Hu Shih was gaining a reputation as the father of the Chinese Renaissance. He became instrumental in popularizing the vernacular as a literary language, so that today Chinese writers can express themselves in a tongue understood by the people, instead of the old classical forms which were unintelligible to all save scholars.

He told me that he was the only child of a young Chinese woman who had married a middle aged widower with grown up children. She had consented to this marriage because the contract money paid to the bride's family would help restore the family home, destroyed during the Taiping rebellion. But she adored her husband as well as her father, and this sense of duty was soon transferred to her only son. She undertook his education. At the age of three Hu Shih was familiar with no less than 800 characters. He soon had read and memorized the ancient Chinese classics. Among his school mates he was called Shien Seng, meaning the Master. Fifteen years later, at Cornell this brilliant Chinese sophomore was nicknamed Doc. He gave me a fascinating insight into the old family life of Old China.

Dr Hu Shih was a disciple of John Dewey, an ardent champion of the intellectual emancipation of his country. It was a delight to me to find such profound comprehension of my outlook in his recognition of all that birth control might mean.

for the future of the world's civilization. Combined with Hu Shih's philosophy was a keen sense of the world comedy, of the laugh behind the tragedy as well as the tragedy behind the laugh. I was to meet Dr. Hu Shih a few years later, in London, in the company of the most brilliant thinkers, yet his intellectual stature suffered no diminution.

On my arrival he promptly arranged with the head of the Peking National University, Dr. Tsai Yuan Pei, for my address there.

Dr. Tsai Yuan Pei, who is at present head of the *Academia Sinica* had gathered into his fold the most brilliant students of young China, all of them avid for the new ideas that were then being crystallized throughout the world. They had listened to Dr. John Dewey and Bertrand Russell. They hoped that the great Einstein himself would come to China to teach them.

My address at the National University was set for four o'clock in the afternoon. Long before we had arrived, the large hall was crowded, and only standing room was available. There was a great scarcity of women. Men were standing in the windows and hanging on wherever there was a foothold. It was a stimulating gathering to address. The air was electric with expectation and anticipation. For two hours I spoke, and answered questions. The audience was responsive, alert, quick to get the point.

My discourse was translated by Dr. Hu Shih and he accomplished this task effectively and brilliantly.

While it took me three hours to deliver a one hour lecture in Japan, the same lecture was translated into Chinese in half that time.

After the meeting I was the guest of honor at a dinner given by Dr. Tsai, Chancellor of the University, and one of the leaders of the anti-Christian movement in Peking. Quiet, dignified, greatly respected, the youthful Chancellor spoke no English, but that barrier did not affect his benign hospitality. It was a typical Chinese banquet, with shark's fins, all sorts of queer and delicious dishes, and three kinds of wine.

The conversation was brilliant, and the repartee scintillated with the flavor of Chinese humor. At that table the discussion penetrated boldly into the realm of scientific research. It seemed to me that it was more advanced than any thought in the rest of the world. The banquet lasted until midnight. My little pamphlet, *Family Limitation*, was passed around, read, translated into Chinese, and was on the press the following morning. Five thousand copies were printed and in circulation that afternoon!

In Peking war clouds were already hanging over the city. The air was tense. Streets were patrolled by armed police. Chang Tso-Lin, in the north, Wu Pei Fu in the center, Sun Yat Sen in the South, were all trying to make for a United China. We left for Hankow on the last train to leave Peking for several days.

Finally, after a trip on the picturesque Yangtze, we reached Shanghai.

In Shanghai, I was particularly distressed to find the foreign quarters so well cared for, with paved streets, beautiful palatial residences, few children well governed and looked after while off in other quarters of the settlement, the Chinese native dwells in unspeakable squalor. It amazed me that foreigners—Americans, English, and French—could live here and close their eyes to such sordid, degrading conditions. They could not live amidst such conditions in their own country without an effort to improve them. It has been said that China swallows up, psychologically speaking, the morale of all who come to live there. I certainly believe that this is true, for during my conversations with foreign missionaries and business people, I found that they had lost many of those standards and qualities of character and conscience which had been bred in them for generations.

During the entire visit I could not accustom myself to the hardships suffered by the rickshaw boys. Being pulled around by an emaciated human being was abhorrent to me. The sight of them everywhere, clothed in thin trousers and shirts, usually suffering from varicose veins, hunger, and heart disease,

is unforgettable. It is said that the rickshaw boy lasts but four or five years at most in this uncivilized occupation, the remainder of his life is spent eking out an existence. Eagerly they solicit your trade, and pick up the shafts of their little vehicles and begin the dog trot journey.

Mr Chen Hai Chang took me to one of the cotton spinning mills on the Yangtze, a few miles out of Shanghai. We went out on an ordinary trolley car, with a first and second class division, as in Europe. We went into the homes of the workers, and found there some of the women who worked on night shift. These homes were one story shacks, consisting of two rooms at most. Several children and grown ups occupied each of them. Cooking and washing were done in the squalid alleys. The mill we visited was one of the largest in China, and employed more than five thousand girls and women. It was a shock like a blow to find tiny children at work. There were hundreds of undernourished, bony little girls who could not have been more than eight years of age. There was, however, no evidence of speeding up, a diabolic method I had seen in the mills not only of my own country but in Japan as well. Our appearance, and the attention we attracted, was a welcome interruption, and the occasion of a brief recess from their monotonous tasks. I was informed that these pitiful little creatures received about ten cents Mexican a day (the equivalent of half that sum in American money) for ten or twelve hours work. Mothers brought their infants to the mill, nursed them there and put them to sleep in baskets beside their machines. The air was saturated with lint and cotton dust. There was light, but the air was suffocating. Here was further evidence of the sacrifice of motherhood and girlhood before the despotism of machine industrialization.

I was invited to address a meeting at the Labor Museum in Shanghai on behalf of three organizations: the Kiangsu Educational Association, the National Association of Education in China, and the Association for Family Reformation. It was the third anniversary meeting of the last named, the Associa

tion for Family Reformation The three essential rules of this organization were not to drink, not to smoke, and not to gamble Its membership, therefore, remained small I suggested a fourth rule of limiting the family to cope with the mother's health and the father's income, and the suggestion was roundly applauded About eight hundred people were present, which seemed a small audience after the response elsewhere The women here attended in some numbers A young woman, lately returned from America, was given the task of interpreting my remarks, paragraph by paragraph I soon discovered that despite her American prestige she had difficulty in understanding me They had asked me to speak in part upon the practical aspects of contraception When I began to do so, the waning courage of my timorous interpreter took flight She turned to me and said, I will go and find a doctor to say that, but the only doctor available had been talking, and had not heard my remarks on the technical aspect

A reporter of the *Shanghai Star* took me for a tour in the Chinese city, where we saw innumerable women with babies lying in the street begging There were lepers too, and hundreds followed us clamoring for pennies Then we visited native factories, where we found children, almost babies, hunched over their work

My excursions and sight seeing tours were interspersed with meetings The Japanese Women's Club asked me to speak In a luxurious private home I met a gathering of cultured men and women The discussion was frank, and all details of birth control were spoken of without embarrassment These Japanese in Shanghai I found to be an unusually intelligent group Freed from the restraint of tradition, the women spoke openly and freely It seemed to me that they were far more advanced than Japanese women in their native land They presented me with a generous gift and escorted me back to the hotel Their charm won me completely, even more than in Japan, because I sensed their courage when liberated from the bonds of convention

In the company of Mr Blackstone, a progressive missionary who had lived in China for the past seventeen years, there came the inevitable inspection of the red light district—I had insisted upon seeing the worst of Shanghai. He spoke the language fluently, and was himself an officer of the Door of Hope, a house of refuge.

The women could be seen through open doorways. Gowned in vivid colors, heavily rouged, they stood out like posters against their squalid background. I shuddered to see women of all races huddled together in Oriental degradation. Soon streets and alleys began to be crowded with sailors, British and American, and, seemingly, all other nations. They apparently preferred the foreign quarters, which certainly are brighter in color than the Chinese districts, so depressingly dark and gloomy.

An unforgettable experience it was to pass through this Inferno, stared at by baby faces through open windows. Each *sing song girl* took her turn upon a high stool, watching the narrow streets to attract the attention of passers-by. In one of these houses we came upon six girls, the youngest surely not more than ten years old, the oldest not more than eighteen. They were seated on hard benches in a cell not more than six feet by nine. Some were Eurasians. Several of them were asleep on the hard benches. The dreariness was inexpressible. We talked to one little girl who said that she was sixteen years old and had lived in one house since she was twelve. She had given up any hope of a change. She seemed as old as the ages in vice, yet her poor little body had the immaturity of fruit picked green and left to shrivel. "Me no want baby," she said, and it was as if a thousand years of tragic sorrow were concentrated in her voice.

We were permitted to inspect the rooms upstairs. They were clean, but depressingly bare and dreary. The girl escorted us with a lamp so that we would not trip and fall. We paid her a few dollars for her trouble, and left. The poor thing seemed surprised at our leaving. Her invitation to stay had

been urgent and kind. She responded so sadly to this unusual human contact—she had so few of them.

The Japanese quarter, not far away, was clean, decorative, and indeed attractive. We found soft, low lights, plain but neat interiors, some of them with a restrained elegance. The girls were dressed in bright costumes, and there was an undercurrent of music in the air.

The missionary told me that there are thousands upon thousands of sing song girls in China. He estimated that there are no less than 100,000 in Shanghai alone. Some of them are sold as babies in times of famine, and brought up for this occupation into which they are thrown at a shockingly low age. They belong body and soul to the keeper, and are never permitted to return to their native homes. Any attempt to run away or any insubordination is promptly met by the cruelest beating and torture. At a certain age they are even sold or rented for a period to Americans and Europeans residing in the Orient.

I confess that after inspecting these districts it was difficult to shake off the hopelessness, the despair they threw upon me. I went away sick in soul, with doubts and pity. Is there, after all, any real hope for this human race, with all our talk of ideals and aspirations? I asked myself. It was horrible to see men of one's own race bargaining with these poor victims for their bodies, or glossing over their depravity in evening clothes in an atmosphere of luxury. They seemed like specimen cases in the devil's laboratory.

We turned from this picturesque area of vice and roamed into the Chinese theatres, and enjoyed the gorgeous traditional costumes on the central figures. At the same time the stage hand, dressed in dingy, everyday clothes, supplied the properties of the grandiose hero. Perhaps there is a symbol in that! It was incongruous, but then, so is life. We heard the story teller on the stage. So, I was told, the Chinese learn the history of their glorious past and also the current news of the world, most of them being illiterate.

Finally, we found our way to the docks where I was to

take a boat for Hongkong My son and some friends were waiting We found the boat at last, but it was too small and a freighter, so we took our bags and went back to wait for a more commodious steamer

Even as I write these memories, aided by my diary, the odors of China seem to assail me Each city, each district, has its own peculiar and inimitable smell, but in addition China has a mysterious odor all its own I can't say what it is—who has ever succeeded in describing an odor with words? But this fragrance or odor comes and goes in various places It seems to march upon one, faintly, indistinctly at first, like a distant army, and then to close in relentlessly, associating itself with memories, making one gasp in protest Shanghai is one of those spots—I mean the native Shanghai, not the foreign city in such striking contrast with the squalor of the Chinese quarters

In Shanghai, the missionary dominates the education of the natives, such as it is Strange it was to find that these missionaries had large families—eight or ten children, as a rule I was told that they were paid a bonus by the missionary foundations upon the advent of each additional child

Our meddling Christian methods have only complicated Chinese problems If the missionaries make an extensive campaign one year to keep parents from drowning girl children, they will find corresponding increase in sing song girls, making their living by prostitution, the next year As each of these girls told the same story of many babies at home—too much baby—no chow—convincing proof was furnished again and again that birth control is the immediate solution of such problems, especially as they relate to the future

China, I believe, offers the best argument in the world for birth control It represents the final act in the national tragedy of overpopulation Here is a great empire prostrate in the dust China, the ancient well spring of art, philosophy, and the deepest wisdom of the world, has been brought down to the lowest conceivable level by the brutal, bestial, and squalid breeding of the worst elements of the yellow races

There are millions of people in China who live below the level of animals. They eat, sleep, and breed in the crowded streets and sunless alleys. Many of them have not even this meagre foothold on land. They are compelled to live on makeshift boats on the river. Go through the reeking labyrinth on one of these native Chinese cities on a day when a hot sun brings out all of the wretched, incurable, diseased and leprous breed with the rapidity and irresponsibility of flies. And we are asked by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church to believe that this multiplication of disease, filth, and degeneracy is directed by divine will and must not be checked by a controlled fertility.

When my enemies speak of the beauty and sanctity of large families, even under adverse circumstances, I no longer rage and storm. I turn the leaves of my visual album to a certain unforgettable picture of a street scene in Shanghai. Walking through the slums with a missionary I saw a leper woman, covered with rags, lying on the sidewalk, her emaciated body shaken in labor pains. She was actually giving birth to a baby, while her naked, pock marked children, who were the only creatures who dared come near her, clambered over her convulsed figure. A hole in the darkness behind them was their home. Horrified by this spectacle, I moved on, followed by a crowd of starving, naked children, some of them blind, all blemished and malformed, crying in pitiful voices for coppers.

China is a land of ghastly object lessons. The age-old injunction to increase and multiply has been carried to a literal conclusion. The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has been here fulfilled. The herdlike obedience to blind instinct, the policy of non interference with the course of nature, have been punished with the inevitable curse. Pestilence, famine, and war are the loathsome substitutes for contraception in checking the population growth.

Hongkong was another story, with its thousands of sampans, its busy water front life. Sampans filled with a strange, busy population which spawns, lives, and dies in these strange

little craft. Then comes the shock of discovering that the coolies engaged in coaling the steamers are women. At the ends of a sturdy pole across their shoulders are attached two heavy baskets of coal. They clamber like ants, in their bare feet, over the coal barges. They do not sing like the male coolies in the north. These women coolies carry bricks for the brick layers, break stone, work long hours in rice fields—do all the unskilled work that men do. I was learning more and more about a much advertised civilization, learning more about the actual condition of women in this modern world of ours.

China recedes into the background—yet I cannot forget the impression of the bound feet of the women. Was this a custom devised by some mandarin to keep his wife from running away? I did not know, but wasn't it the perfect symbol of the enslavement of woman's body? No creature could get very far away with such feet. Sometimes the bones were broken. I was told that the mothers used to sleep with a switch at their head to beat the little girls when their cries of pain became too uncontrolled, too disturbing! This process, I was informed, began when the child was three, and was complete in two years. Now the custom is dying out in the more advanced cities, but in the interior it is still the style. However, hospitals and schools were said to refuse girls with bound feet, so a beneficent influence is being exercised to that extent. I had seen many women in Peking with bound feet. At Hankow it seemed to be the universal custom. I saw two or three of them leaning upon each other for support as they walked along. What a relief it was to discover children with normal feet! Though to see Chinese nurse maids with bound feet hobbling painfully along after their European charges made me want to protest.

I regretted that I had not met more Chinese women. The more advanced ones were being educated by the missionaries, their future development will undoubtedly be influenced by this background. We hear of the influence of the celebrated Soong sisters in the Kuomintang government at Nanking,

of any deep emancipation, I must confess that I found slight evidence

While my tour through China did not have the same significance as my meeting in Japan, yet I feel that, considering the lack of time and preparation for my Chinese trip, the results were excellent. The Chinese press was thoroughly sympathetic, and the *China Times* devoted a whole section to the subject of birth control in its Sunday issue of April 30th. This group of young Chinese editors has kept up a steady flow of birth control articles in the Shanghai press from that date to this. *The Ladies Review* a Chinese monthly magazine, devoted its May number exclusively to a discussion of the subject along lines of enlightenment and encouragement.

Wherever I spoke, I met an enthusiastic response. I feel that one of the important things for birth control sympathizers to do is to keep the spirit of the cause alive in China. For certainly China is as striking an example of over population and resultant degradation as the world can show. It might with difficulty be made the reformer's first battle ground, for from what we know of our customs it would be a hard fight, so hard that if it were won the education of the rest of the world would be a simple matter. So said the *South China Morning Post*. This epitomizes the situation in a few succinct phrases. Yet, in spite of it, I believe that there is no more encouraging prospect for the general practice of the idea than in China.

The fine flame of the ancient Asiatic spirit is flickering. It is threatened with extinction. There is the rising tide of famine, of wretchedness, of epidemics, of transmissible diseases—now of civil warfare—a flood which is spreading with serene disconcern of efforts to stop it.

We are asked to contribute to famine funds, to the support of Christian missions in China and Japan, or to Far Eastern philanthropies. It is an obvious fact that the great part of these funds is not devoted to intelligent, scientific charity, but to the never ending and fruitless task of temporarily relieving physical miseries of otherwise neglected elements

A year after my visit to the Orient, I received a letter from Chen Hai Cheng of Soochow assuring me that my brief visit to China had not been without tangible consequences. He wrote

Ever since your departure, birth control has become one of the much discussed topics of the press and among the intellectuals of this proverbially conservative land. As far as I know, hundreds at least have actually practiced and followed the different methods as suggested in your pamphlet. It has been translated into Chinese and published by myself. The first edition enjoys a wide distribution in Shanghai, Peking, Nanking, Changsha, and other cities, though with only a little publicity. The copies have been practically exhausted. We are therefore considering the feasibility of a second edition.

The reading of this little pamphlet has already stimulated people's thinking to such an extent that more than a hundred have written to me for further enlightenment on the subject. Had these readers not been handicapped by linguistic barriers, they would have showered you with such inquiries. As a matter of fact, all of them were confidentially answered to the best of my ability. A nucleus has been formed which consists of about twenty members who thoroughly believe in the propaganda. Two are professors at the Government Peking University, and two are editors of the Commercial Press. As you have seen, the China field is particularly rich with possibilities. No legal nor constitutional stumbling blocks are set in our way as yet. But we are at the infancy stage, so to speak. We have to look up to you for guidance and instruction. We rely on your kind sympathy and support.

It was a relief after it all to find repose on the S S *Plassy* en route to Port Said, to sit in the glorious breezes and to dream, to be surrounded by fifty or so clean young British couples going home with their clean young children some

of them with Chinese nurses, which meant that Pater was on his vacation and that the family would return to the Orient in six months or a year

Yet it came as a shock to discover that even on this side of the globe, my movements were officially scrutinized

At Hongkong I had been informed by the so-called water police that the Chief of Police wished to see me

Is this an invitation for all the passengers, or only for me? I asked

Only for you, madam, the police officer smilingly answered

I went to the hotel, and later in the day I called for a chair and was carried to police headquarters Naively I inquired if there was anything the matter with my passport The chief was not present at the moment A consultation among the other officials was called, but none of them knew why he had summoned me

The next day he called and left his official card at my hotel I returned his call, and left my card at his office This went on for three days while I remained at Hong Kong Finally, the boat sailed, and we went on toward Singapore

Word of my approach had evidently been cabled ahead There was noticeable agitation and excitement among the officers when my passport was shown I was politely asked to stand aside while they went into consultation Then I was ushered upstairs into the private office of the chief officer There I was questioned by a charming young Englishman concerning my intentions in going to India

But I am not planning to stop in India! I protested

They are announcing several lectures by you in both Bombay and Calcutta, he informed me

This is the first I have heard of it, I responded My mind worked quickly I realized that I had evidently missed one boat's mail in Japan and also in China from the Indian adherents, consequently I had abandoned the idea of lecturing there

But would there be any objections, I asked, should I desire to stop off in India?

That would depend on the subject of your lectures

There is but one subject that interests me, I answered

He pressed a button. Miraculously, almost like a scene out of a mystery play, as if the whole scene had been rehearsed in advance, an attendant entered and placed upon the desk a large case card, closely typewritten

Only one subject? queried my interlocutor, with a smile

Then what about your interest in —and he read from the card, which evidently recorded all my various interests and activities of the past several years in America in an organization called Freedom for India— Freedom for political prisoners? What about your friendship with Agnes Smedley? Agnes Smedley was a radical young American schoolteacher who had been drawn into the battle for free India. She is now in Shanghai

And there, in distant Singapore, on the other side of the world, this British officer read from that card details of a small reception that I had given five years before, in the privacy of my modest apartment in New York City, for Agnes Smedley, after she had been released on bail in a birth control charge that had later been dismissed. Her crime had been that she had in her possession a birth control pamphlet. Had there been a secret service man in that gathering, or had there been a dictaphone to record so accurately the outspoken criticism of British rule in India?

I was speechless with amazement

Why shouldn't I be interested in the ideals of my compatriots? I asked. Why shouldn't I help her when she was arrested for a cause that is my own?

He listened politely as I recounted the details of the battle that has been waged against birth control. At the end, he agreed that if the vast millions of inhabitants of India wanted to receive that message he for one was all for my going there. He was intelligent and friendly. He said he would visa my passport if I desired to go on that mission.

Other considerations, however, made it impossible for me to go to India at that time. The Fifth International Conference was to convene in London in a few weeks