

IN CHINA, TOO

BY PEARL S. BUCK

It is rather alarming, even sitting in one's armchair on the opposite side of the world, to observe the youth of America and England through the various newspapers and periodicals of the times. Especially when one's days have been spent, placidly enough, among the ultraconservative parents and grandparents of a remote spot in the Far East, where the covert glance of a man for a maid is an outrage, and the said maid is at once fastened yet more

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bor homes about me. All I can see of the flapper age of maiden within is when a curtained sedan-chair stops behind the spirit wall protecting each great carved gateway. If one watches keenly enough from the corner of one's eye, one may see a slender figure in peach-colored, brocaded silk, with tiny embroidered shoes, and smooth jet hair decorated with seed-pearls, slip shyly through the gate. Fragile, long-nailed fingers stained a deep rose, a satin-smooth, painted cheek, and dark, downcast eyes — an instant, then the curtains are drawn, and the chair-bearers go trotting down the street.

Sometimes it is a ponderous dowager, in plum-colored satin, with proud drooping eyelids, opium-stained teeth, and a long bamboo pipe, silver-tipped, which she uses as a cane. She leans heavily on two girl slaves, and is supported into the chair. If her eyes fall on one, their glance passes haughtily through to the space beyond. What! notice a foreign devil! A flash of ruby and the curtains are drawn close, and the chair-bearers trot off again — albeit not blithely, under the royal weight.

I never see, on this narrow, cobbled street, the barbarous sights whereof I read in the modern magazines. Yet all day long, people are passing. In the early morning, blue-coated farmers, and sometimes their sturdy, barefoot wives, come to town, carrying on either end of their shoulder-poles great round baskets of fresh, dewy vegetables, or huge bundles of dried grass for fuel; caravans of tiny, neat-footed donkeys patter past, with enormous, cylindrical bags of flour or rice crossed upon their backs, swayed down from excessive burdens borne too early. Sometimes their nostrils have been slit, that they may pant more rapidly under the weight of their cruel loads.

Wheelbarrows squeak shrilly along;

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turnips, gobbled rinds and all. But apparently they live to grow fat; although I have occasionally called one by his name of Little Two, to be answered with a broad grin that he is Little Three, Little Two having died of an excess of watermelons the previous summer. But where one drops out, two spring up to fill his place.

They play about promiscuously in the grime, until, in a few miraculously short years, the boys turn out in long gowns, and the girls in embroidered coats, with smooth black bands of hair about demure faces. They have apparently forgotten their playtime together, and ignore each other with the most perfect good breeding. The little girls go into seclusion with apparent docility, until such time as the great red bridal chair shall call them forth to the rule of a mother-in-law; and the boys turn to school or an apprenticeship, depending upon the family means and social position.

All a very placid and well-regulated existence. Yet I am vaguely troubled by a sort of undercurrent of change; as, for instance, yesterday, when little Hsu Bao-ying came to visit me. I have known her since she was a mite, with a fat, solemn dumpling of a face, with no nose to speak of. At that time, her feast-day garb was a pair of ridiculously small red-cotton trousers and a little coat to match; a pair of shoes made to resemble improbable tigers, and a cap like an embroidered doughnut, with a tiny pigtail done up in cerise yarn sticking through the hole. Her parents are of the good old conservative type, not believing in overmuch book-knowledge for a girl, and with an eye to a good husband and mother-in-law for the child. An older married sister, advanced in views through a five years' residence in Shanghai, had teased them into sending Bao-ying to a boarding-school in the nearest city. When the

securely behind barred courtyard doors.

Dancing on six inches or so of floor-space, the discussion of knees and necks and petting parties, the menace of the movies and the divorce question, are a far cry from this tranquil corner of my cool, wide veranda. I look through the shady screen of drooping mimosas and bamboos, upon the quiet street of a small town in the far interior of China. High brick walls almost hide the curving roofs of the staid, respectable neigh-

the more loudly the better, for each wheelbarrow man cultivates his barrow's squeak assiduously for good luck's sake. They are brawny men, with swelling muscles, bare to the waist, their backs dripping and brown in the heat of the morning sun; a length of blue cotton is thrown lengthwise across their shoulders. Sometimes the barrow's load is a substantial country mother, in to shop or to visit a town relative, herself on one side of the wheel, and her bedding, a couple of cocks, a bundle of garlic, a basket of cakes, an immense oil-paper umbrella, and an odd child or two, on the other side. Sometimes an unearthly squalling racks the air, and it is a wheelbarrow with a stout middle-aged hog strapped firmly on either side of the wheel, with his legs waving violently, and squealing in the utmost agitation and outrage. A wheelbarrow, in short, may carry anything, from a lean itinerant missionary, with a six weeks' supply of bedding, food, and tracts, to a double basket of squawking fowls — geese, perhaps, with yards of neck protruding from the loosely woven reeds, and viewing the passing landscape excitedly.

Smiling, snag-toothed old men hobble along my street, with wrinkled brown faces, and sparse white queues braided up with a good deal of black string. They pass the time of day with each other by solicitous inquiries as to when the last meal was enjoyed — a curious outgrowth of a land of frequent famines.

Everywhere are fat brown babies tumbling about in the dust, for the most part naked and glistening in the warm sun, and grubbing among the cobbles and gutters. They ought to die, when one considers the amount and quality of the dirt they constantly consume from grimy fingers and unspeakable faces, not to speak of immensely long cucumbers and great

child left last for school, last autumn, she was a tractable, meek, sweet-faced little thing, rather frightened at the prospect of leaving home. She had the patient air which all little Chinese girls have who are enduring foot-binding. I had never heard her volunteer a remark, and in my presence she had always been particularly awed and reverential — an attitude I have ever found very pleasing in the young.

Yesterday she came in a delicate blue satin of a more fashionable cut than I had ever seen; her feet were unbound and in little clumping, square, black-leather foreign shoes. She was evidently very proud of them; they looked like shoes for a very rough little American boy, and had steel taps on the heels. They stuck out most oddly from her exquisite brocaded skirt.

After we had exchanged polite remarks, and had taken our first sip of tea, she was so evidently conscious of her feet that I could not but comment on her unusual footgear.

'It is the very latest fashion,' she replied with great satisfaction. 'You know that, of course, in the big cities like Peking and Shanghai, the really fashionable girls do not bind their feet any more. At the boarding-school they don't either; and so, when I came home, I cried for three days, without food, until for peace they unbound my feet so that I might wear these beautiful American shoes. My feet are still too small, but I stuff cotton in the toes.'

Here was change, indeed! I fell back astounded in my chair. There she sat, slim, exquisite, and complacent, but no longer one to be condescended to, and not at all reverential. I felt slightly dashed. And in the course of the afternoon's conversation, I noticed several other things: a little superior smile at her honored mother's lack of worldly experience, as the present generation sees it; a petulant wish that her honor-

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able father would smoke cigarettes, as everyone else did, instead of that absurd, old-fashioned water-pipe; a hint of a suffragist meeting attended, in the city where she had been at school for the year. One year ago, oh, my soul! and Bao-ying had been a shy little thing, with eyes eternally cast down, and never a word to say unless pressed to answer a question, and then so faint a voice! And now this young person chattering away of school and cigarettes, and what not!

'What do you know of suffrage, pray?' I asked in great amusement.

'Oh, a great deal, teacher,' she cried eagerly. 'I know that only in this country are women so helpless; why, in other countries, I have heard, they do everything they like! They may go out and take walks and play games, and never bind their feet. It is even said they walk with men,' — here a delicate flush, — 'but of course I do not believe that. Although this year, teacher, for the first time, we had men at the Commencement exercises — but only old ones. I looked when nobody saw me, and they were very old. Some of the girls at school are very wicked, and say they will not marry unless they are allowed to see their husbands first. But, of course, that is very bold!'

She shook her head virtuously. Then she looked up at me from under her eyelashes and asked shyly: —

'Of course, in your honorable country, the girls do not walk and talk with young men?'

I cleared my throat at that, and hesitated an instant. I thought of the magazine I had just been reading.

'Well, my dear,' I said, 'times and countries change, and I have not been back there for many years.'

'I should like to know,' she said wistfully. 'Of course, one must not be bold; but really one's parents are too stupid about anything a little different

reverence of my own pedantic old self, and discomfort at having my opinions, fixed by years, questioned and even flouted? How much of it, I wonder, is middle-aged stiff-neckedness? What if, after all, these young upstarts are the beginnings of a new growth out of the decadent soil of an old civilization insufficient for this day and time? The universe of space and time is not comprised within this old street, with its secluded, shaded courtyards, and spirit walls guarding dragon-carved gateways.

If these young things let the sunlight into the courtyards, and tear down the spirit walls in unbelief, and even desecrate these marvelously wrought dragons with modern paint and plaster — if, I say, it is done in the name of a new era of general enlightenment and clear thinking, and of a struggle for better things and conditions in this sleepy, unhygienic, ignorant old town and country, to the winds, then, with my slow, conservative soul and love of old-time reverence and manners!

I am rather breathless over it all, having had my main outlook on life the

For the world is marching on!

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last quarter of a century from this quiet corner of my veranda in a little interior city of China. We are really very conservative here yet, the rare visitors from an outside world tell us. Vague rumors of coeducation, of men and women dining together in restaurants, of moving pictures, and even imported dances, float in from the port cities. I know that I sometimes see the inhabitants of such places pass through the abominably ugly railway-station, which has just been foisted upon our old-fashioned little old town; and they look scandalous women to me, with their wide, short trousers and short sleeves and tight coats; but I suppose I am behind the times. I confess that I like my old Chinese friends better, with their courteous speech and gracious manners. I dislike the acquired abruptness of these young creatures. I dislike the eternal cigarettes, and the blasé, self-sufficient expression on young faces, which I am accustomed to seeing timid and reverential.

But — and but again — how much of my displeasure is dislike of the ir-

