

# "THAT REMARKABLE WOMAN..."

**A.M.R. interviews Miss Annie James, M.B.E., of Dunedin and of the N.Z. Presbyterian Mission Hospital, Kaai Hau**

A HALF-RUINED five-storey pagoda topped the last ridge across the valley. Reaching it I slipped off my rucksack and lay in the long grass surveying the basin that opened out ahead. Immediately below, the river-highway wound opalescent among golden sandbanks and green bamboo groves, a toilsome procession of hand-poled junks. In circle above, swam the mountains, fairy blue, peaked and jagged in reality as in Chinese painting, and diffusing the same gentle blue "pearly" clarity. The basin floor itself was brown with dry ricefields. That walled city on the left would be Tsung Fa. Those two square pawnshop-strongroom towers on the central flat with grey-brick houses clustering round would be my destination, Kaai Hau.—1933 Diary.

"THE same time as they attacked Canton the Japanese came over the mountains unexpectedly and occupied Kaai Hau," explained Miss James when I met her again the afternoon she landed back in New Zealand, 13 years after the date of that entry in my diary. "But our area was too populous for them to stay in safety. So they fortified the gorge between us and Canton and every now and then burst in and tried to clean up the Tsung Fa pocket of resistance. After Ku Kong, the headquarters of the Kwangtung Provincial Government, was captured, there were Japanese all round us till the end of the

war. I felt very queer when I was told that at first. But one got used to it quickly."

"—and carried on the hospital?"  
"Yes. Except, of course, when the Japanese were actually occupying it. Then you just had to get out before you were caught, grabbing everything you could lay hands on. Usually it wasn't much, because you couldn't hire anyone to help. Everybody else as well was too busy taking his own things. Sometimes I carried our main drugs and things a little way out of the village and then had to leave them hidden. After that I would come back at nights with a coolie and we would dig some up and carry them further away. We'd start walking in in the late afternoon and get back about dawn."

"But wasn't that dangerous?"  
"Not so very. You see the Japanese always retreated into Kaai Hau itself at nightfall. But a 20-mile walk in the dark, fording rivers up to your armpits or sometimes walking up to your knees in slush and carrying a heavy load, got very wearying. I'm sure I'd walk chain

after chain in my sleep until I'd stumble awake over a stone. All the same, being kept out of the hospital was a chance to get the books up-to-date—though you really couldn't properly because prices kept going up and up. When I left, a Chinese egg—say half the size of ours—cost 150 dollars and a hundred catt of rice cost 500,000 dollars—that is a million dollars for about two hundredweight. The smallest note circulating was 50 dollars."

## A Battle on the Way Home

The figures were staggering. But the implication in Miss James's statement that such flights as she described, leaving the hospital in Japanese hands, were frequent, was even harder to take in. How many times had she had to leave, I asked.

"About 20, I'd guess. Sometimes I'd go out to a case and find that I was running into a battle on the way home with the earth pounding up towards me. The worst time was when a battle raged right around us and bullets and things kept whistling over the open courtyard.

We wondered then if keeping out of Japanese hands really was worth it. The destruction was horrible. Once, I remember, some Chinese who had been told to hold a gorge to the last man sent for me to come at dark to attend to their wounded. But before I arrived the hillside was set on fire and they all perished."

"But where did you get medical supplies during these five years?"

"Well, we always had some, but not always those we wanted. The worst thing was doing without quinine, as quite often we had to. It was hard to keep things going when both myself and the two Chinese nurses—there was no trained help to be had—were all shivering with malaria together. I got double malaria, two sorts at once, and the bouts went on for months on end until I was away down below six stone in weight. So long as Britain was not at war our mission people inside the occupied area could smuggle drugs out to me, by paths away off the beaten track."

"So I've been told. And how you were once captured as you passed through

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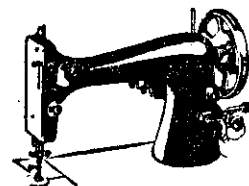
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