

# CHINA WAS THE GO-BETWEEN

## Muriel Lester's Visit To N.Z.

"TO my aunt Muriel Lester who brought me to China."

That dedication in the late George Hogg's book *I See a New China* was the only introduction many of us in New Zealand had to the English social worker prior to her arrival here a few days ago. And for her part, until this, her first visit to the Dominion, the only New Zealander she really knew was one she had met in China—Rewi Alley, with whom George Hogg worked.

I was keen to hear how she had been instrumental in George Hogg's going to China, where up to his untimely death he had played an important part in the

her innumerable lecture engagements, and there were other questions to be put, since her China associations were not the sole reason for my interviewing this lively, energetic Englishwoman.

Prior to her arrival two friends had written to me about her. One reported that she was George Hogg's aunt; the other spoke of her as a worker for international understanding—in the course of which activity she had travelled widely, as a friend of Gandhi, and as a co-founder of Kingsley Hall, a London East End community centre.

Miss Lester's work in the East End began about 1903 and 12 years later she and her sister started Kingsley Hall in the borough of Poplar, the building being given by their father in memory of a



MURIEL LESTER AND INDIAN STUDENTS  
*A change of outlook was observed*

Chinese Industrial Co-operative Movement, and Miss Lester told how just as she was starting out on an tour overseas her nephew had asked if he might accompany her. He had enough money for a single boat ticket to Shanghai via America and he could hitchhike across the States while she was lecturing there. She was only too glad to have his interesting company, and the journey was made. While in America he became interested in a co-operative farm for sharecroppers in the cotton fields. Then Hogg and Miss Lester were invited by Dr. Kagawa, the Japanese Christian leader, to visit co-operatives in Japan and Hogg spent some time studying this work before he rejoined his aunt, who went ahead of him to China. In China George Hogg found his life work. When Miss Lester came to continue her journey through India and back to England, her nephew said he could come no further with her. He could not leave the Chinese people then suffering from the Japanese invasion, and he never did.

There was much more to be learnt about Hogg and his work with the Bailie co-operative training schools, but time was short, for Miss Lester had one of

brother who had recently died. There opportunity was provided for educational, social and religious activities. After World War I, Miss Lester became an alderman in the Poplar Borough Council and there also was able to work to improve the lot of the people in the district. In 1933 she resigned from her work at Kingsley Hall and since then she has been travelling around the world lecturing for international understanding and peace.

This work has taken her to India almost every three years over a considerable period of time, and has brought her into touch with many prominent Indians. Gandhi she met in 1926 and when he came to England in 1931 he stayed at Kingsley Hall. On one visit to India she met an Indian just out of prison. He was wearing the unpretentious clothes of a poor man, a spare dhoti over one arm and a small bag containing his possessions in his other hand. In face and bearing, however, he was impressive. A few weeks ago Miss Lester stayed with him in his magnificent palace, for that man was Mr. Rajagopalachari, who is now Governor-General of India. Other Indian leaders, too,

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