

THE WOMEN OF CHINA CAN TEACH US MUCH

SEVEN years in Shanghai as Medical Officer of Health should give a man an outside, if not an inside, acquaintance with domestic conditions in China, and I was anxious to get, even at second-hand, some impressions of Chinese life in addition to those provided by Nora Waln and Pearl Buck. So I called upon Dr. Hubert Smith in his office at the Health Department.

We began by talking about E.P.S. precautions. In this, of course, Dr. Smith is professionally interested, and he spoke at length on the necessity of providing against dislocation of water or sewage systems. "In China," he remarked, "the necessity does not arise, because, except in the big modern cities, there is no communal drainage system and no communal water supply."

"Does the housewife get her water from the well?"

"Yes, or the creek. And the creek, as well as serving as the laundry and for washing the rice in, is used as a main highway and sewer by a large population who spend all their life on the water, and also takes drainage from the field and road. The wells are certainly better than the creeks, but not much less dangerous."

For One Meal Only

"Isn't it surprising that there are comparatively few epidemics? How do you account for it?"

"Quite a lot of the credit must go to the Chinese housewife, and her care in the preparation of food for the family. Long before we Westerners developed the science of bacteriology and were able to demonstrate mere causes, the Chinese unwittingly realised the value of sterilisation. Everything that is eaten (except fruit, and there is very little of that) is cooked and eaten hot at one meal. No Chinese housewife worthy of the name would ever cook more for an ordinary meal than could be eaten at one sitting, while no honest Chinese family would ever leave anything uneaten which had been cooked for that meal and might conceivably be wasted."

"The universal drink is hot water with sometimes a few tea-leaves in it. They never drink unboiled water. So you see that everything in the way of food and drink is sterilised before being served, and there's nothing left round for flies and vermin to get at. A good lesson for our New Zealand housewives to take to heart if our sewage and water systems are disrupted."

Problem of Fuel

"Housekeeping must be an exacting business for the ordinary housewife. And isn't fuel rather a problem?"

"Yes. The ordinary Chinese peasant doesn't see coal very often. Chinese coal is used only for industry and for the

houses of foreigners. And wood is scarce, as all available land has to be used for the raising of food crops. Most of the cooking is done on top of a kind of little clay oven, and there's always a large vessel of boiled water for drinking and for washing the food. The chief fuel is straw and an occasional twig. There's sometimes a charcoal brazier for heating. But any time you wander out along a Chinese country road you see dozens of toddlers collecting fuel for the household. As soon as the Chinese peasant child can walk it's set to do something."

"And the mother works in the fields?"

"Yes, with the youngest baby strapped on her back. But to get back to the cooking. Perhaps it's accounted for by the shortage of fuel, but the Chinese housewife cooks her vegetables so lightly that they remain crunchy and retain all their mineral salts and vitamins, a practice which compares favourably with the old English habit of boiling vegetables to a soft mush and then throwing away the water, and perhaps accounts for Chinese children rarely suffering from bad teeth."

"In spite of the fact that there's no such thing as a pint of milk a day?"

"Yes, there's not even a quarter of a pint of milk a day for the Chinese toddler. Land which has to grow three, or more usually four crops a year to support the life of a Chinese family, cannot be run in grass for cattle or sheep or horses, and so there's almost a complete absence of domestic animals. So the Chinese coolie child gets no milk after it has left its mother's breast. Out here we would consider it almost impossible for our child population to survive without an adequate supply of cow's milk. But the Chinese manage not only to survive, but to multiply exceedingly without any help from the cow."

Substitute for Milk

"Just before I left China they were beginning the manufacture of a milk substitute made from ground soya beans, plus lime and molasses or raw sugar. This has roughly the same constituents as milk, and even manages to look something like milk. Its advantages are that it can be made locally—even by the peasants themselves—that it comes within the price range of the average coolie, and that it's practically germ-free, so there's no need to worry about milk-borne diseases. During the present Sino-Japanese war, thousands of gallons have been made and distributed to Chinese children in refugee camps near Shanghai."

"Before the war did the ordinary Chinese coolie, the man who had to work sixteen hours a day to get enough food for his family, have any intense national feeling?"

"No, he was too busy trying to get food for himself to feel intensely about anything. But now even the most

ignorant and illiterate Chinese peasant has an idea what the war's about. It's been brought home to him."

"There must be many women in China to-day widowed by the war. Can they carry on in place of their husbands as providers for the family, or are women still largely debarred from wage-earning?"

"Usually it isn't a case of earning wages. In the country the Chinese peasant usually owns his little allotment. If he dies, the wife, used as she is to working on the land, carries on more or less as tenant till her sons are old enough to take over. She does not inherit the land."

Mothers-in-Law Supreme

"Then the new movement for sex equality in China has not seeped down to the peasantry?"

"No, the new movements, such as mass education and the New Life movement, have so far made little difference to the great body of peasantry. But in China these things take time. Of course I can only speak of the district round Shanghai. In the west, where the new co-operative factories have been established, women are taking their place in industry. But among the peasantry the wife and mother has few rights."

"Then who has? The father?"

"The mother-in-law. The wife begins by being semi-slave and hand-maid to her mother-in-law. Then when her sons marry she exercises the same tyranny over her own daughters-in-law. And so it goes on. The mother-in-law runs the household, even the father has comparatively little say. The position arises from the respect for age among the Chinese. I remember one occasion on which I was about to perform an operation on a small child for diphtheria. I had permission from the parents of the child, but at the last minute the father rushed in and announced that the grandmother would not give her consent. They took the child away. It died, of course."

"And can a girl who thinks of marrying choose her mother-in-law?"

"No. There is still remarkably little choosing to be done by either party in a Chinese marriage. The marriage is arranged by the respective families, and such questions as dowries are settled through a marriage broker, or middleman. No family, however little able to afford the fee, would dream of dispensing with the services of the middleman, and no marriage would be respectable without him."

"This is only another instance of the tremendous power of tradition in China, and all the movements that aim to build a new China have first to overcome the innate conservatism of China as a whole. The great obstacle—of course—is the illiteracy of the masses, and the leaders of China to-day are right in basing their whole campaign upon a scheme for nation-wide education."

—M.I.

WAYS WITH BOMBS

IT is perhaps regrettable that Guy Fawkes celebrations were curtailed last November, for in the case of fireworks familiarity breeds contempt, and after all incendiary bombs are merely a larger variety of firework. If we had spent the usual days before November 5 allowing small boys to let off crackers behind us we would now be in a position to sneer at the hissing and general exhibitionism of an incendiary bomb, and it would be with complete sangfroid that we would deal it the fate of the little princes in the Tower. However, since the last two Guy Fawkes Days have passed without fireworks we can condition ourselves only by attending the demonstrations which from time to time are staged for our benefit.

Four hundred women, representatives of different organisations, attended a demonstration of ways with bombs at the Wellington Central Fire Station the other day. The first demonstration was with a German bomb, torpedo-shaped and finned. After that we had to carry on with the British variety, which owing to its greater length and stick-like shape, is rather easier to handle.

The fire brigade chief began by showing the usual composition of a fire-bomb, the detonator in the tail, inflammable material inside the bomb, and the inflammable casing itself. The force of landing is usually sufficient to explode the detonator, which ignites a length of magnesium ribbon and then the thermite inside the casing. By this time sufficient heat has been generated to ignite the magnesium casing itself. And burning magnesium ignites in a somewhat spectacular way.

Before—And After

If possible, of course, the bomb should be disposed of before the fireworks start. It can be picked up in the hand (there is no danger of explosion) and plunged straight into a bucket of water.

If, however, you fail to arrive on the scene within two minutes of the bomb's landing, the flare and spluttering will have already started. If you have a bucket of water and the bomb is still approachable, approach the bomb and douche it thoroughly with the water. Or, alternatively, use your E.P.S. shovel to pick up the bomb and throw it into the bucket of water. Sand may be used to smother the bomb, but it is advisable to remember that you need a great deal of sand to cover it completely, and even then the bomb may go on burning a long time under the sand. So after putting on the sand, the bomb should be picked up in the shovel and plunged into a bucket of water. Sand is chiefly valuable in that it prevents the bomb from spreading.

A hose is invaluable in dealing with small fires. According to the Wellington

(Continued on next page)