IMPRESSIONS OF CHINA.

To be coming into any foreign port is a thrill one never forgets. But one of the greatest of such thrills is when you come into a port in the orient for the first time. Though everything may seem strange and different when visiting many parts of Europe, still we find much that is akin to our ways of thinking and doing. In many cases their ancestors were ours. Though we may speak a different language, we think along similar lines, and below the surface differences, we seem to have much in common. But coming to the orient is quite a new contact and experience.

Heading out across the broad Pacific a stop at Hawaii helps to turn our thoughts toward a new world, or should I say the old world. Yes, Honolulu is still America, but there are large colonies of Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos, and we begin to take for granted different physical features and darker tones of skin than our own. On to Japan and we are truly in the orient. A beautiful little country with a charm all its own. But that is a different story for today we are thinking of China, so we must sail on further west and south for our first port of call is Hong Kong.

To those who are fortunate enough to come into this beautiful harbor after dark, they are greeted with a sight long to be remembered. The island of Hong Kong stands just off the mainland shore and quickly rises from the water level up to the Peak. At night the waterfront and business section is a blaze of lights, reflected in the water, then climbing by terraces toward the residential areas, up and up to surprising heights, and as the lights thin out you begin to wonder "is that a star or is it the top most light?" It is a glory few harbors can show us and a cherished memory.

By day we have a new picture. The Peak and the city are still there for a background, but we are more conscious of the sights and sounds and smells near at hand. Countless little sampans crowd around the steamer to beg for coins, sell strange wares, to advertise various shops, or to scoop up refuse thrown overboard from the ships kitchens. We begin to see poverty such as we have never known it before. Talking and shouting among the people on these strange little boats and on the dock, what sounds like a riot about to break out is probably only friendly bargaining, but there is much of it on all sides. Cargo being hauled by coolies who carry what seem to be back-breaking loads balanced on both ends of bamboo poles, moving to a sing-song rhythm, a short quick step which makes the going easier both physically and mentally. As for smells—new and unaccountable smells are very much with us. But this is only a slight introduction to what is in store.
In the bright sunlight we realize that Hong Kong is in the semi-tropics, and above the business section of the city there is much that is green, fine trees and gardens and gay flowers. Being built on the side of a mountain few streets are level except near the water front. To climb to the higher levels there is an electric tram, or certain steep streets which usually end up as a climb of steps. Streets are narrow and crowded, and because of unavoidable climbs the use of an auto is limited, rickshaws fit the narrow streets better, but only sedan chairs can take the steps. So your mode of travel varies as to where you may want to go.

But we must remember that Hong Kong is British though it has a Chinese background. It is an interesting mixture of both influences, but the British does predominate.

So we must go still further to see real China, and from Hong Kong that usually means Canton, up the Pearl River about three hours by train through flat cultivated country, mostly rice fields. On our arrival at the station was surprised to be taken by boat further up the river and really into the heart of the city. For to thousands of the city, life is spent on the river. Congestion of the city crowds out countless numbers who have made their home, perhaps for generations in small sampans on the water front. Sampans, four or five deep on either shore, hundreds working their way up or down the river selling their wares or carrying cargo. Life goes on on the little open deck, cooking, washing, tending the baby, a chicken or two. The coffee colored water of the river used for all purposes then dumped back again. Life is hard and with little if anything to look forward to. And yet the Chinese always have a ready smile for you.

Well in the center of the city is the island of Shameen. This is the section given over to foreigners - consulate, banks, business and some residences. Under foreign control and supervision, you appreciate a different standard of sanitation - not good but better.

The only adequate way to see the city is by sedan chair for Canton is truly old and that means narrow streets. And when I say narrow, I mean narrow, for two chairs can hardly find room to pass each other, and pedestrians are always into doorways as you pass. Roofs are overhanging which makes it dark below. The little shops are open to the street. As you are carried along there is so much to see at every turn. Of necessity we move slowly, but never slow enough to see everything. We peek in the front of little silk shops, or jewelry, crockery, furniture or fans, restaurants where the cooking is going on right before you. Shops to the front with the family living in the back, cats roaming in and out at will. Dogs in China are more the scavengers than pets, and are not the
friendly creatures they are to us in America. Surface sewerage and flies beyond number add their atmosphere. Smells have become potent and you wonder what you are really taking into your lungs. On my first visit to Canton in '23 I nearly smothered burying my nose in a handkerchief, and it was a question as to which way you would prefer to pass out. But I will give the city full credit that by 1930 smells and flies were much reduced and sight seeing seemed less hazardous. Perhaps too, on my first visit, not being used to the closeness of crowds, the shouting which often means arguing rather than anger, being by myself in a sedan chair, being taken at the will of your coolies and not being able to converse with them, friends were near in the chair ahead or behind you, but home and family seemed far away and you wondered if, when or how you would get out of this fascinating, mystifying, and even terrifying maze of crooked narrow streets.

There are new and wider streets more on the outskirts of the city where walls have been taken down and lanes cut through. But they are the exception rather than the rule. That is the new China that is coming.

The return trip at the end of the day was by river boat back to Hong Kong. Shortly before sailing we realized that some special passenger was coming on board. Banners with names and messages were being carried and soon fire crackers were going off. Yes, this is China the home of the fire cracker, and what a holiday this would have been for any American boy. We have seen Giant Fire Crackers but seldom such set off by packs. This was even more, a string of them hung from an upper window of a high building, 4 to 5 stories from the ground, and reaching down from there to the street pavement! What a noise and going off for fully 15 minutes. But if that is their idea of a good send off they certainly expressed themselves elegantly.

We were made comfortable on board, first class passengers on the upper deck, 2nd class, Chinese below. Though stretched out in deck chairs with an interesting panorama of river life to watch, we were not yet fully at ease. Pirate raids along these waters are all too common, and recent newspapers telling of such raids were quite fresh in our minds. And only to emphasize the possibility, armed British guards paced the deck before us. But the night we came down there was no such incident, but always the uncertainty until we were safely back in our quarters in Hong Kong.

To see Canton is an experience that beggars for words to describe. It takes you back centuries, you feel the congestion of China's millions, primitive living on land and water, hints of the exquisit glory and beauty of brocades, jade and carvings, customs strange and new to us, life is hard and labor cheap, yet with it all a smile can be found
so easily. It was a thought provoking background for other pictures in other cities, of life in the great land of China.

In 1936 as I was primarily visiting the Margaret Williamson Hospital and the Bridgman School for Girls, missions in which I have special interest in Shanghai, a large part of my time in China was spent in this city. In striking contrast to Canton, Shanghai is a new city. Only about a hundred years ago it was an insignificant fishing village when it was named one of the treaty ports, and was opened to trade with the outside world. Its location accounts for its rapid growth. Shanghai is on the banks of the Huangpu River, 13 miles up river from where the Whngpoo flows into the Yangtze at its mouth. The Yangtze with its great network of connecting canals, the main artery of the larger part of all China, so close to Shanghai, now open for foreign trade is a natural gateway for all China heading toward the sea, and for all the world coming into China.

And so as we head for this new port we are first conscious of a change in the appearance of the water while we are still out at sea. For the muddy waters of the Yangtze are in evidence even before land is in sight. At its mouth the great river is so wide we hardly realize we are in the river before our course is turned and we follow the Whngpoo a bit to our south. Because of the great quantities of silt carried down by both the Yangtze and Whngpoo Rivers there are shallow bars at the mouths of these rivers which add to the complication of deep sea vessels entering the harbor. It is quite usual to have to wait for the tide for large vessels to pass over the bars, then up the narrowing river bed. In contrast to the flat lands all around us, the tall buildings along the Bund of Shanghai come as rather a surprise. But Shanghai will have many surprises and contrasts to give us.

This is certainly a bustling harbor. Flags of countless nations are to be seen flying from passenger vessels, freighters, and naval ships. Strange high decked Chinese coastal boats, river junks with their huge ragged sails, and always countless little sampans working their way in and out between the great boats of the harbor.

But the shoreline, the famous Shanghai Bund, hardly seems like China with its fine modern buildings that would do credit to any city of the world. Banks, hotels, business buildings, neon lights everywhere. The docks teeming with coolies waiting to carry baggage or freight. Always much noise and confusion. Coming ashore our first contact with Shanghai traffic is again a surprising study of contrasts. Streets here are usually wide which means many autos and even great double decker buses, electric trams,
rickshaws, two wheeled carts being pushed and pulled by man power, and the cumbersome Chinese wheelbarrow used both for baggage and passengers. There is supposed to be some direction to this seething mass of traffic but that is often hard to recognize. Most every one and everything seem to go with a will of their own.

As Shanghai has been the gateway for the outside world seeking entrance into China so we find all nations represented in this great city. It is truly more an international city than Chinese. As has been said "Shanghai is not China but near China." The foreign concessions though now given up have done much toward the modern development of the city. Broad streets, sanitation, modern buildings, adequate policing, parks, Race Course, clubs, fine large department stores and hotels all show close contact and influence with our Western world. It is a city of extreme wealth, both of foreigners and Chinese, and also extreme poverty. Finest opportunities of education with its many schools and colleges, and for spiritual growth through churches and missions, and at the same time there are the lowest forms of immorality and vice. Its reputation in this direction has gone far and wide and is a constant menace to the city. The war has only increased this problem as refugees from all over the world have flocked there by the thousands and most of them are destitute people.

My weeks in Shanghai brought me in touch with another side of this complex city life. I was staying with friends of the Margaret Williamson Hospital which is located in the old Chinese section of the city called Nantao. Here again we were in the narrow streets where sidewalks are not known and where pedestrians and vehicles of all kinds weave their way in and out together. Here where care is so needed is a great hospital of 250 beds serving not only the sick women and children of Shanghai, but also training Chinese girls as Christian nurses to go out and serve their own people.

It was a wonderful experience for me to have this close contact with the daily opportunities, problems and needs of such a work. It was wonderful to see the high standard of work being done with the minimum of equipment or comfort. It was not only the care of patients in the hospital that interested me, but the necessary follow up work to complete what had been so well started. The Well Baby Clinic where the babies born in the hospital were brought back for a regular check up by the doctors. The Mothers have so much to learn in regard to modern care of their baby. The love and desire are there but not the knowledge. Old Chinese customs and habits mean too often only the survival of the fittest. I was especially thrilled for the opportunity to make visits with a Public Health nurse. These were follow up visits to patients recently discharged from the
Hospital. Visiting in homes of both rich and poor gave me an insight into Chinese living not usually given to tourists. The welcome these nurses received was a joy to see. But how much there is for these mothers to learn and how many problems hamper the way. I wonder what I would do were I living in one room with others, no heat in the house, no running water and water had to be bought by the kettle full down the street, how often would I bathe my baby and put on fresh clothes? Life is not a simple or easy matter for these people. But they are anxious and eager to learn if given some guidance by those who have found a better way.

There was also at the Hospital a Post Graduate Class for Nurses. This group though not large represented medical work from all parts of China. Coming to a large port city, many new opportunities for advanced work in nursing are to be found here. The city itself has recognized this responsibility and have had doctors and nurses with advanced training in Europe and America return to them to establish a modern program in health education and care of the sick. Shanghai has a tuberculosis sanitarium, care for lepers, fine modern hospitals and clinics, rural programs in centers outside of the city. It was truly encouraging to see the Chinese themselves with a real forward looking program, seeking to improve the conditions of their own people and putting the best of skill and experience into their work. The war no doubt has put back this program countless years, but they have had the vision and they still hold the knowledge and desire and some day their hopes will be realized.

There are many dark grey days in Shanghai and much dampness in their climate. You long for real sunshine, the open country and fresh greens. To get away even for a day from the noise and congestion of crowds in the narrow streets is a bit of tonic and lifts your spirits. So there were short trips planned to Hangchow, Suchow and Sung Kiang. It is surprising how much baggage is needed even for just a short time. Always picnic food, an extra blanket or pillow, perhaps something to read or letters to be written on the way. The special thrill in visiting both Suchow and Sung Kiang were days spent on small houseboats going through canals out through these towns, through a net work of canals connecting with the Grand Canal, out into the open country where the air was fresh and clean, where the welcome signs of new spring life were on every hand. In the flat open country picturesque pagodas stand out conspicuously and always add much interest to the view. When going through villages it was the old stone bridges that we frequently passed under that especially caught my attention. Massive stone, steeply inclined on both sides, making a high arch, often called a camel back bridge, with its lovely reflection in the
water beneath. Homes come right down to the stone walls lining the canals so we were entertained by the domestic scenes of family life as we passed by. Food being prepared, utensils washed, children at play. But all life stops as we came in sight for foreigners are always a curious sight and we each looked at the other with absorbed, unabashed curiosity and interest.

But in coming to China there is one city above all others that travelers are most eager to see and that of course is Peking, now called Peiping. Well to the north, it is a train ride of about two nights and two days. Though three of us were traveling together I was surprised to see the quantity of baggage which piled up as we got ready to leave. Perhaps largely due to prepared food which we took with us for most of our meals. Tea can easily be bought on the trains while dining room meals are expensive. We had a compartment to ourselves which gave us comfort and privacy. There was one modern touch. I found in the Shanghai Station which I have never found here at home. As our train was about to leave, friends saying good bye and the usual confusion and excitement of starting off, suddenly we were greeted by band music carried over amplifiers along the platform. It was a real send off and added to our own excitement as I realized we were at last heading for that great and ancient capital of China.

Traveling for days through this vast land I was impressed by the lack of roads. That is roads or highways such as we have known them throughout the States. The railroad was the one line of communication north and south by land. There is some traffic by camels, but the roads were more like foot paths through fields and between villages, or tracks for two wheeled carts, but no pretense of a paved roadway. You realized that people do not expect to travel about the country. You would grow up where you were born. Some travel because of trade by great river junk or rafts. But travel by auto is not only unknown but impossible except in restricted areas near larger cities.

The open country is always an interesting panorama. It was spring so there was much work being done in the fields. But fields do not mean unrestricted cultivation, for anywhere you will find great mounds of dirt which are graves, ancient or modern. These of course must not be disturbed, they are honored ancestors, and perhaps have been there for years or centuries. So the plowed furrows wave back and forth, up and down as they prepare for another year’s crop. In the rice country the different stages of the work preparing for a new planting are always interesting to watch. The water buffalo plodding knee deep in the mud, fields flooded, seedlings transplanted in long even rows, making a neat pattern as their work is finished. Countless little villages were passed with their
mud walled huts and tiled roofs. Life was simple but held little of promise for those who called it home. Comparitively few large cities were passed on this trip of nearly two days.

On our second morning we were eagerly awaiting our first sight of Peking. It is a rambling city with low buildings so it spreads out over a large area and is enclosed by walls. In fact you soon come to realize that there are cities within the city, and walls within the walls. Being flat country rickshaws are a very convenient means of transportation, so we were comfortably taken bag and baggage to our temporary home on a mission compound – an attractive campus with gardens, a quiet spot well enclosed away from a busy, noisy world just outside.

In Peking we soon hear of the Tartar City, the Forbidden City as well as the Imperial City, different sections of this ancient Capital. It was a surprise to find many wide avenues, though not too well paved. At many turns our way would be blocked as we came up to high walls surrounded by moats. For in the heart of Peking is located the Forbidden City which was a large area given over to the Imperial family, a large retinue of high officials and the official buildings. Just to the north of the Forbidden City is a small artificial hill known as Coal Hill. With its lovely trees and old temple at the top it is always a popular for visitors. For from its summit one can get an interesting general view out over the roofs of this Forbidden City. We find a mass of golden yellow roofs, those are of the Emperors buildings, and others of a rich dark green for the lesser officials. Peking's yellow Imperial roofs and the great weeping willows sweeping over the moats about the old walls are to me symbols of the cities ancient glory and beauty.

Within the Forbidden City is the special section known as the Imperial City, the inner sanctum, and of course it is one of the first places to be visited. It is all now open to the public but because of the vast areas covered, different sections are opened on different days. So much time would be needed to really see all. If you come with recollections of other palaces and chateaux such as are in Europe, and are looking for similar interests here, you will be greatly disappointed. Chinese life is different. Here we find an endless series of courts, great pavilions, the throne room and audience chambers, interesting walls strangely decorated and gateways. There are marvelous carvings in marble and wood in the buildings, rich coloring in columns, beams and under the eaves. There are pools and gardens. You feel the vast spaces now standing empty, and try to picture the life that was once there, of the soft shoes, richly robed men and women, exquisite embroidered gowns. You feel their keen eye for the beautiful, exquisite detail,
never over done. The culture and arts of centuries can be found here. America with its enthusiasm of youth, noise in sound and color, rush in thought and action seems far away and childlike in this atmosphere of quiet simplicity, beauty and dignity. Though we may have much to give China, they too have much to share with us and there are many lessons we could learn from them. Many of these fine buildings are now museums where are kept many wonderful treasures. They have gathered together much of the fine porcelains, carvings, embroideries and brocades. There is a feast for your eyes and food for thought as you try to picture the royal life of another day in this far off land.

Covering acres of ground you can really see but little of this great city, now so nearly empty. One section I was taken into in a small car. But few passageways were possible to us for ways were narrow, and moon gates do not lend themselves to autos. But I did see far more of where there were open gardens and beautiful lakes all of which only emphasised the vastness and beauty of this Forbidden City.

Another center of interest is outside the city to the south, the great Alter of Heaven and Temple of Heaven. This is where once a year the Emperor offered sacrifices for all his people to the God of Heaven. The Alter is of white marble, a great circular platform with three or four terraces of marble one above the other, each with beautifully carved rails and stairway. Nearby can be seen the Temple of Heaven, a white building with a rich blue tile roof. It is a very quiet spot, away from the busyness of the city, and sacred to those to whom this ceremony has meant so much.

One sight, though not in Peking, has, and always will draw visitors, and that is the Great Wall of China. It is a train trip to the north of two or three hours to a little jumping off sort of station. From there we were to take donkeys out to the wall itself. It was not so far but the walking rough, steep and anything but comfortable. With the crowd of Chinese student tourists who came on our train, any donkeys were soon hard to find. So we quite welcomed two forlorn little creatures we finally found. It wasn’t until I was boosted up on my little creature, there was no saddle, and I was expected to stay on board only by the moral support of my donkey boy! All was well until we started down a steep grade and I began to slide down the animals neck. To add to my problem the donkey had their usual stubborn disposition and every so often tried to buck me off. It was hardly a pleasure ride, but I did arrive none the worse for the experience.

As you get out into the open and finally up on the Wall you cant but be impressed with the massiveness of its construction. Wide on top as a narrow city street, watch
towers every so often as it winds up and down the hills, on and on as far as the eye can see. A colossal effort, wonderful construction, yet it now seems but a childish attempt to keep out an invading enemy. Having grown up with school books showing pictures of the Wall countless times, it seems a very familiar sight even on your first visit there. You fell as though you must have at some time been there before.

No matter how long your stay in Peking may be there never is time enough to see all your heart desires. There is the Summer Palace to the west of the city where the old Dowager spent lavishly of public funds for her pleasure and foolish whims. Again pavilions, gardens, lakes, quite like a great park. Beautiful and costly. An ideal spot for an all day visit taking along a picnic lunch. There are temples and towers and colleges to be seen in the city. Old and new sections. Foreign Consulates with reminders of the Boxer uprising in 1900 and the tragic consequences for foreign and christian residences.

But nothing held my attention and interest more than the sight and sounds of the streets themselves, the life of today in that fabulous city, so different from what we know here in America. Out of curiosity while there I listed some of these sounds and soon had over twenty. Here are a few of them. The night watchman who taps bamboo sticks to let you know he is coming, coal carriers with bells on their wheel barrows, the squeek of the water cart wheel, camel bells as caravans plod their slow way through the street, brass gong ofblind beggars, the cry of food vendors selling strange smelling wares, and overhead pet pidgeons flying with small reed whistles attached to their legs.

Funerals are often a great spectacle, a sight very new and strange to us. Bands are always popular and head the procession. For a modern touch foreign music may be played, and a favorite tune for such occasions is "Marching through Georgia", or other equally unappropriate airs are also heard. Other times a typical chinese band will play with their strange tones and tunes and insturments. A long procession of mourners follow, whether family, friends or paid mourners. Material things for the comfort of the one who has died to be used in the next world. These are copies in paper of household furniture, an automobile and ofcourse food and money, all of which will be burned at the grave. Finally in this long procession will be carried the casket. Mounted in a large wooden enclosure painted a bright red, it is carried on a heavy wooden framework. The weight of all this is terrific and requires many bearers. Twelve to twenty are commonly seen. But for people of high position there may be nearly a hundred.

Just to walk or ride in your rickshaw through the streets is a constant thrill
with never ending surprises for eye and ear and then to wonder what it is all about!

The story of Peking can never fully be told, or even the impressions of a visitor there but for a short time. The more you see the more you want to learn of this great land and their winsome people. Our days slipped by all too quickly, and we were again heading south toward Shanghai with many lasting memories tucked away in mind and heart.

China and its people have a subtle way of working into your heart and making a lasting place for themselves there. They have a way of winning not only their friends, but their enemies. China never looses its individuality. Even though through the centuries it has been over run by conquering people, slowly but persistantly China has finally absorbed them and they have come to be a part of China. So again today China is threatened and the future looks dark, their spirits are low. But China has before, and I believe will again rise above the menace of an outside power. It will take time, but China reckons in centuries, not in years, and they have the patience that can wait indefinitely. As she comes in touch with other countries may she recognize and seek the best in them, and so grow stronger and take her rightful place among the great nations of the world.