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NO SACRIFICE...NO VICTORY

*Agnes Smedley, China correspondent,
writes of China's war-wise women,
who have made their choice*

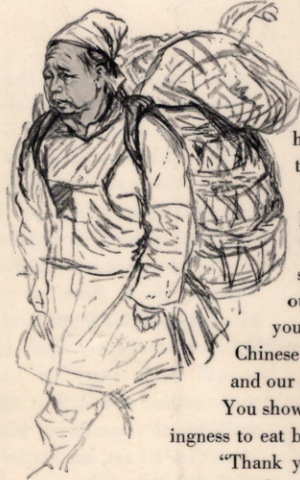
WHILE sitting at my table in my small, barren room in one of the hospitals of the New Fourth Chinese Army along the front, a delegation of women one day visited me. As is the custom with the people, they pushed open the unpainted door without knocking, and stood there. First came a tall, gaunt peasant woman with thin hair caught in a small knot at the nape of the neck. She, like the younger women who followed her, was in her finest clothing—blue or grey cotton trousers and blue, or newly-washed white, jackets fastened up to the throat. All were wives or daughters of peasants or small tradesmen.

The old woman, their leader, was sixty-eight years of age, but she might have been fifty, and when she began to speak she might have been ten years younger, so firm and vital was her voice and bearing. The younger women yielded precedence to her. Native ability had marked her for leadership, but life had cast her in the small village, isolated from channels of human culture.

We bowed to each other across the room, as is the custom, and then all sat down on the narrow benches brought in by an orderly.

"We are from the Woman's National Salvation Association," the old woman said in a harsh, grim voice. Her lean, brown hands grasped the cotton trousers across her thin knees, and the tendons in the hands and wrists stood out like whipcord. "As you know, today is March 8—International Woman's Day. You are an American woman, so we Chinese women have come to express our solidarity with Western women. We want you to tell the women of your country that we Chinese women struggle to emancipate ourselves and our country. We women must arise and struggle. You show the high spirit of womanhood by your willingness to eat bitterness with us."

"Thank you—but I do not eat bitterness. It is you women and your Army that eat bitterness. I gave up nothing to come here."



軍委會政治部製

民族至上

"Yet you have come to this battlefield to face danger and death with us."

"Where is there not danger and death today? All of us have but our choice—to choose our battlefield."

"Right!" all the women exclaimed. The old woman then added: "We women want to comfort you, so we have brought you a chicken and ten eggs."

One of the younger women returned with a small basket of eggs and a squawking chicken with its legs tied together. I arose, bowed, and accepted the gifts, but protested that I did not need them.

"Do not stand on ceremony," the old woman remarked peremptorily. "Take them—eat!"

"Tell us what we women here should do," she went on.

"Tell me first what your Association has already done."

"We have organized forty women in this village," the old woman said, "and with the three other villages we have over a hundred. The younger women study each night; our cultural level is low. We hold discussion classes, and one of the Army women helps us. We discuss how we can best help in the war against the enemy and win the final victory. The final victory will be ours even if we lose many battles.

"We urge our young men to join the Army and fight, and our older men to help carry the wounded or carry things for the Army. We do more field work so the men can fight or help the Army. I have two sons fighting at the front, but my youngest son helps me in the fields. He is fifteen. I am a widow."

"YOU are very brave. Do you do much field work?"

"When the season begins I work all day in the fields."

"It is you who eat bitterness."

"All must sacrifice now. Without sacrifice there is no victory. We do not want to be slaves of the devils. But now we have a hard problem. In our village are men who do nothing but gamble all day long, and some smoke opium.

"That Army over there," she waved her hand to the west, "brings in opium on their military trucks, and no man can stop them. We women have gone to those gambling and opium places and said: 'Men! Our sons and husbands are fighting at the front, and here you sit gambling and smoking opium. You disgrace yourselves and our country. You have no right to waste money gambling.'"

"Do they listen to you?"

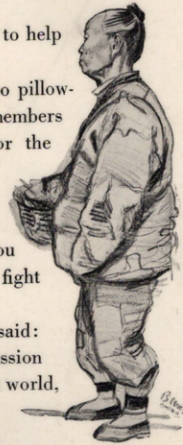
"Listen to us!" she exclaimed. "No! They say we are only women and should get back to our kitchens and act like women instead of trying to step out into public life like men. We have talked with the men with love in our hearts, but they have no face."



"What else can you advise us to do to help the Army?" asked one of the women.

"The hospital has no pillows and no pillow-cases. Is it possible for each of your members to make a pillow and a pillow-case for the wounded? You could embroider words to comfort the hearts of the wounded—words like 'Hero of the Nation,' or 'Towards the Final Victory'. I am certain you can think of many things. It is also my fight—this war," I said.

The old woman looked at me and said: "Yes, as the woman who leads our discussion classes says, we fight for the people of the world, and our cause is one."



SOON we arose and went outside to go to the hospital. Beneath a large pine about a hundred women, all clad in clean clothing, with a number of men, were sitting in the shade, waiting for the old woman and her group. The men sat amongst big baskets filled with many gifts, and two of the men had a half of a slaughtered hog slung on a big pole between them. When we appeared, they all arose and followed us up the path to the great family temple of a landlord, which the Army used as a hospital.

For the thousandth time, I stood watching and listening to the poor men of China, and to the poor women also, expressing ideas and shouting thoughts that have lifted them over centuries. I thought of these people in these small, isolated, backward villages, dull, monotonous, cut off from all streams of world culture. Now they spoke of free women of the world, of women as citizens with the rights and duties of citizens; they used words such as "cultural," "the final victory," "international woman's day," "guarding your rear," "learned women."

It was about a week later that one of the Army doctors came into my room in the hospital and urged me to come out into the clinic at once. I went, and there on a stretcher lay the old woman peasant leader.

"Oh, American comrade!" she exclaimed weakly as I bent over her. "Look what they have done!"

I looked! Her clothing was torn, and she was battered into a black and blue mass of flesh. And as the doctor and nurse tended to her, she told about it.

"We argued with the gamblers and opium smokers with love in our hearts," she said falteringly, "but they would not listen. So many of us women went with sticks and said: 'We have argued with you with love in our hearts, and we have tried to make you patriotic. You would not listen. You are like traitors stabbing our Army in the back. We now order you—go home.'" (Continued on page 87)

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(Continued from page 49)

The gamblers arose from their tables and began shouting vile abuse at the women, telling them to go back to their homes and not come into public places like prostitutes. The old woman advanced on them, with her club raised, shouting: "Lou man!" (gangsters) and "Han chien!" (traitors), and smashed her stick right down across a table, scattering mah-jong cubes and money all over the floor. The men took up benches and fought the women, and some broke off table legs and beat them.

"They beat and injured me," she said grimly, "but we have had a great victory. Almost every family had an injured woman, so everyone went to the *chu* official and told him the people would arise if he did not close down the gambling and opium shops. Now the owners and many of the men who beat us are all sitting in jail!"

"I hope you will be well soon," I said at last.

"It is nothing! I am old, and I can not get well so quickly. But it is nothing. There can be no victory without sacrifice! Now, American comrade, you can write. So please write to the American Women's National Salvation Association and tell them about this. They will know that we Chinese women have arisen and that we struggle bravely, as they do."

I think my voice trembled as I said I would do that, but I sat thinking of American women—well-clad, educated, going to movies to see bathing beauties in bathing-suits or women finding the solution of life's bitter problems in the mirage of a Hollywood kiss and embrace.

"American Comrade, Come!"

A month or so passed, and I had almost forgotten the little proposal I had made about pillow-cases for the hospital. But one day my door was pushed open, and there outlined against its unpainted yellow surface stood the gaunt, dark figure of the old peasant woman.

"American comrade, we have brought the pillows," she said. "Come!"

The women began going from bed to bed, giving each man a pillow. They were as yet too shy to lift up a man's head and place the pillow beneath it. They presented them formally, the pillow held in both hands, and the hands of the wounded came up and took them. The lines of men began murmuring with admiration and with many an "ah!" and an "oh!"

Each pillow-case was embroidered in coloured silk, with leaves and flowers or bamboo and pine and birds, and across the face of each case were words for: "Hero of the Nation," "Toward the Final Victory," or "Defender of the Nation."

But there were five pillows too few—and now two new Japanese wounded prisoners were in the hospital. The old woman bent over two of the Chinese wounded and explained that

there were five pillows too few, but the women would make some more. But she would like to give the two Japanese a pillow each so they would not feel sad.

"Take them! Take them!" the two Chinese wounded replied, and surrendered their precious, beautiful pillows. But they watched them go with something of reluctance. The old woman patted them kindly, took the pillows, and presented them to the two Japanese wounded. She patted their shoulders in a motherly way. On the two pillows were the characters for "Hero of the Nation!" and "Toward the Final Victory!" Since Japanese and Chinese writing is sometimes the same, the Japanese read them with astounded and embarrassed smiles, looking upon the scene about them with wide eyes.

Japanese at the Hospital

The women broke up into small groups again and began talking to the wounded. One of the Army doctors spoke Japanese, so he took the old woman leader to the beds of the two Japanese. She sat down on the hard boards and began talking to them about their homes, their mothers, their wives or sisters, and telling them how sorry Chinese women are that Japanese militarists have forced this war upon them. This finished, I heard her begin on the woman's movement, on the rights and duties of women and their equality with men.

"Now she'll fix them up!" I thought to myself. She had them on their backs, and they would have to listen.

Japanese officers warn all their soldiers that, if captured, the Chinese torture them to death. This is one reason the Japanese often fight to the death rather than be captured. Now here lay two of them, under the care of Chinese doctors, and they were being given presents. But an old woman leader was talking to them about woman's rights.

They were learning the weird idea that women are not born merely as wife-servants, or as females to be raped. The old lady would thrust the woman's movement down their throats, patting their shoulders so it would go down more easily. I walked away, laughing.

An Army doctor halted me in the aisle. "What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"That old lady over there is torturing two Japanese prisoners of war."

The doctor's eyes were wide and startled. "What on earth are you saying?" he exclaimed, glancing beyond me at the Japanese.

"I said the old lady over there is torturing two Japanese. She has them on their backs and is making them listen about the rights of women—how women are the equals of men."

We stood in the aisle and laughed and laughed.



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