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Out Where We Live

By GRACE COOK

RECENTLY in this column, I referred to Agnes Smedley's new book, "Battle Hymn of China," asking Agnes what she would put in place of marriage as a working pattern for rank-and-file mothers in a new world.

Today I give to Agnes' reply all the space the editor gives me. I am sorry I can't quote all of it, but must pass over briefly her objections to the marriage institution as it now exists, a relic, in her opinion, of slavery for women in which few are happy. "Let the successful ones speak," she challenges in turn, "and speak loud."

Marriage and motherhood must be kept separate, Agnes thinks, because motherhood is basic, while marriage laws are man-made.

"Children—all children—should be considered as the general wards of society. We have government institutions to protect wild life and farm animals. It's my belief that children are as valuable as hogs or cattle, to say the least. It's also questionable if many parents are worthy of having children, or of bringing them up after they have them. The minds of many, many people are distorted in childhood by ignorant and selfish parents.

GRACE THINKS that a 'social consciousness' which makes no provision for society to survive is questionable. Right. But the existence of human beings with social consciousness is also questionable—as witness this present war, and contemplate future ones in which men and women without social consciousness massacre each new generation.

"Yes, in China, I did indeed view most foreign wives and rich Chinese wives with a jaundiced eye. I had plenty of reason. . . . The Shanghai factories were filled with wives and mothers and with their children, laboring 12 to 14 hours a day, without the well-to-do raising a voice of protest. When Chinese mothers and wives and their children went out of factories on strike, the police would shoot them down or beat them. No protest came from the well-to-do, white or colored. Where was sacred motherhood?

Miss Smedley Calls Freedom Asia's Theme

Miss Agnes Smedley, author of "Battle Hymn of China," was one of the speakers at the sixth series of Book and Author Luncheons, sponsored jointly by the American Booksellers Assn. and the New York Herald Tribune, which opened in New York this week.

Miss Smedley, who lived in China for 12 years and traveled extensively with Chinese armies and guerilla units, described the needs and ultimate aims of China as they were explained to her by soldiers and officials throughout China.

Great New Civilization

"Out of Asia will emerge a great new civilization, and it may depend on us what it will be," she stated. "They want freedom from all racial and color prejudice. They want freedom from white men, or the ambitions of yellow men. They don't want our yoke fastened on them again."

Miss Smedley said a Chinese soldier told her that after the war there are going to be no very rich people in China. "We are all going to be equal. There will be work for everybody and everybody will get an education free," he said.

Commenting on the soldier's statement, Miss Smedley added: "If you take that, plus the socialized medicine and industrial cooperatives China is developing, I think you see what she hopes to achieve."

WHERE WAS the voice of American mothers and wives while their husbands sold scrap iron and gasoline to Japan to slaughter the Chinese? I've little use for selfish motherhood, and I'll continue to insist to my dying day that wives and mothers should assume the full responsibilities of citizenship, and cease to be 'simple souls' who leave the affairs of the world to those moved solely by predatory greed. . . .

"Since returning from China, I've met countless women and girls, and boys too, who grew up during the depression. They are afraid of the future, afraid of life. In our country, the richest on earth, many of our soldiers are today getting the first regular meals, decent clothing, medical and dental care they've ever had. Why did we have to leave our children to find refuge in war and death?"

YOU MIGHT argue, Grace, that this has nothing to do with wives and mothers. It has, because it has to do with social consciousness, and children and the care of children. . . . Here at Yaddo, we had groups of 'underprivileged' boys from New York City for vacations. The brothers and sisters of some of these children could not even come to Yaddo for the summer; they had to be sent to hospitals to be treated for malnutrition. I should think that all wives and mothers, especially the educated, would become despised propagandists and pour out into the streets to change the whole social structure that creates such a situation.

It's not enough to merely take care of our own. Not even of our own race. Our social consciousness should embrace the world, and we should create a society that cares for all human beings. We would find like minds to ourselves in every land, for we privileged Anglo-Saxons are not the chosen people of God.

YOU SAY with sarcasm, Grace, that wives could not leave their children and run off to the Eighth Route Army, as I did. . . . There were many married women in the armies. In the war zones I saw countless wives and mothers who, while they did their duties as mothers, were also striking off

the shackles that had impeded their sex.

"The time might even come, for the new generation, when motherhood will be regarded as a profession worthy of protection; but a profession that is merely part of citizenship as a whole."

Another time, perhaps, I'll answer Agnes's answer; unless others write in to do it better than I can.