

New Books of Interest in the Far East

Business Man's View of China

China Hand, by James Lafayette Hutchison, Lathrop, Lee & Shepard, New York, 1936. U.S.\$3.50.

Without benefit of literary flourish former B.A.T. man Hutchison brings us through the China scene as a business man saw it from 1912 to 1917 and from 1929 to 1933. His story is the familiar one that few others have had the energy to put into book form, and thus CHINA HAND will appeal most to those whose experiences have been roughly parallel. Such readers may see again the events, the places, and the figures they themselves have known in the past 25 years.

As a record in history the book, written by a youth fresh from the U.S., carries one through the early days in Peking under Yuan Shi K'ai, down into the desperate poverty and decay of Shansi, to commercial Tientsin, into rapidly developing Manchuria, back to noisy, raucous Shanghai, and so on "home" after 1932. Only by this time the author is no longer the "griffin"; he is too discontented with the changing times to see through the eyes of wonder starved youth.

Six main interests seem to have excited Mr. Hutchison's attention during his life in China; constantly he jumps from one to the other as on a six-key piano, so that the whole yarn is geared to the limitations of his range. These half-dozen interests are:

- (a) the sex life of the foreigner in the Orient;
- (b) a mysterious yearning for the decaying gilt of Peking—the new name, Peiping, "seemed an insult of youth to a glorious personality grown old and left without resistance";
- (c) the eternal peace of the desperately poor interior where the tobacco business carried the author despite the evils that flesh in China is heir to;
- (d) the horrible jazz madness of the U.S. and Shanghai since the War;
- (e) the dreary picture for business in Manchuria with the regime of young Chang and the efficient and far-sighted Japanese;
- (f) some harsh and mournful words for the Kuomintang and its vulgar habit of painting blue sayings from Dr. Sun on white walls even in the ex-Forbidden City itself.

Perhaps because advertising was the author's specialty did he find the defaced walls so nauseating, for he writes: "Progress—of a kind, yes—but did those writings carry a stronger appeal, a more progressive appeal, to the best instincts of humanity for a good government and a good life, than did the sayings of Confucius and Lao Tze? Were they better adapted in a practical way to a nation of craftsmen and farmers? After all, what was progress?"

When the *China Hand* confines himself to simple description rather than to philosophy he is more effective, possibly because the reader does not expect so much. The accounts of poverty-stricken generations of Shansi farmers goaded into banditry, of foreigners "bewaunked" by the conditions of a strange culture that seemed to charm them snake-like away from their own moorings, the misery of the white Russians in the north eager to do anything to get to Shanghai—these are bits that the reader will remember, these are things that the author puts across without venting too much of his constant dissatisfaction with most of the aspects of life.

Again, it is in coming from the famine-stricken "way back yonder" into a world whose headlines scream World War that the author makes a real point and a worthwhile one. In the face of wholesale murder on scientific principles he is struck with something less than admiration for the "hell of a mess called civilization." Conscious of the death and hardship behind him, known only to a few missionaries and foreigners working in the midst of it, Mr. Hutchison drives home to us that "such happenings were too far removed from the world of the outsider to interest him. Therefore, they were not news."

Turning to the style of the book one is struck by the author's lack of self-consciousness, for he put down what *he* has seen and what *he* has felt. He is not trying to picture a China that did not exist for him. Thus, in a sense, the volume can be looked on as a part of the record of West meets East, for someday the complete story of the foreign business man in China will be told in terms other than statistics. It is a personal record such as this that will give some clue to the reactions of a *China Hand*.