

CONFESSIONS OF A PROPAGANDIST.

Gentle Reader, have you ever been a propagandist? If not, my advice to you is---forever abjure so exacting and so thankless a profession. For my own part, I was lured into becoming a propagandist in the most artful manner, so that I did not know, until it was too late, what was happening to me.

Once upon a time it came to pass that I left my home in Asia to visit New York City after many years. In my Asiatic "home-town" there flourished a most authentic and respectable American college, where it had been my fate to pass several years of a very happy youth. And when I had been in New York some time I was asked one day, would I be ready to help my old college? I said I was willing, but unprepared, enthusiastic but surely of very little use. But the Trustees who ran the Asiatic College out of the goodness of their hearts were in need of a spokesman, they said, to educate America and to raise money for their College. I had lived much in Asia. I knew the College from A to Z. Had I not been educated there myself, among that strange medley of foreign girls? Was I not exactly the person they wanted? In vain I protested that I was not. I had a special aversion to making myself conspicuous and no desire to pick the pockets of the rich. I had none of the arts needed in public speaking and I hated to beg. However, under the genial assurance of my kind-hearted trustees that it was all very easy, I weakly gave in. And so one fine morning I awoke to find myself employed by the Asiatic College as propagandist.

I started out with as much enthusiasm as I could muster. I endeavored to find out what was expected of me and after considerable questioning of the Particular Trustee to whom I was responsible, I mapped out my duties somewhat after this fashion. I was to visit as many schools and colleges as I could and address students on the importance of the Asiatic College, and if possible solicit their interest, attention and financial aid. I was to help distribute literature to old friends, tentative friends, possible future friends and The Rich, in discriminately.

It was a large problem and I tackled the schools and colleges first.

From a small office adjoining the sanctum of the Particular Trustee, I wrote a hundred and one letters to school headmistresses, college presidents and deans. Would they let me come to their schools to tell the students about the Asiatic College? Did they know what their students were missing in not being "au courant" with American education in the East? Were they aware of the vital importance of uplifting the hordes of Asia?

Some evidently were not. They ignored my letters completely. Others, more polite, but very cautious, regretted that their interests were already so many that they could not add another to the list, so that if I would excuse their frankness and so on and so on. A very few said they would be glad to hear what I had to say. These last I considered angels of light and intelligence and proceeded to visit them wherever they happened to be.

You may imagine, I had experiences. As a matter of fact, I acquired a liberal education in the system of private schools and colleges throughout the country. The genus, headmistress, I grew to recognise as an old friend, were she worldly, thoughtful, practical or haughty. The Sweet Young Thing, who constituted the average school girl I grew to know so well that I could tell without so much as looking at her, what she would say next. The procedure in speaking at schools was very similar. I was usually hurried along in a train to a smart little suburban station, where there would be waiting the School Car, and whisked over the country roads to The Building. There I would be greeted either by the Principal or leading student, taken to dinner, and later led by the hand to the platform to deliver my small speech on the Asiatic College. Usually there was much interest. Students are good listeners and American students are always eager to hear of Europe and Asia and their strange outposts.

I would dilate upon the similarities between the East and the West, in the eagerness of youth and the desire for education. I would point out that the background of my students in Asia was strange and oriental. My audience would give a gasp of satisfaction when I turned to the marriage customs. I grew to know just where the response would be warmest, the interest keenest. Sometimes

I would throw pictures on the screen. Two pictures always provoked laughter--- the Whirling Dervishes (I could hear the ripple beginning at the back of the room as the picture took form) and the Students of the Asiatic College at Gymnastics. This last was not a laughing matter, I would hasten to add. I would counteract its humorous qualities by a serious talk on the importance of athletics for the indolent oriental! It was only when I came to the gist of my lecture that I noted a stirring of unrest in my audience. Weakly I hurried over this most distasteful part of my task. Inwardly apologetic, no matter how brave in appearance, I set forth this need and that and made an appeal for funds. I could feel the interest lagging instantly and my words would sound flat to my apprehensive ear. Abruptly I would change the theme--- and with a personal note--- hope that they would sometime visit our institution, when they came abroad (yet how much I longed to tell them not to miss the gorgeous mosques and enchanting bazaars of that elusive city of the orient) and at last with a smile I would sit down amidst their generous applause.

Then would come questions, sometimes formal ones at the end of the talk, more often informal ones as the girls gathered round me. They were nearly always the same. Did the students of Asiatic College have many sports? Did they like parties? Were they musical? Did they ever have midnight feasts? Was it true that Mohammedan girls never saw any men?

Then a bell would ring and the audience with its fluffy gowns and smiling, young, carefree faces would disappear, presumably to some hidden study hall. I would then either talk to tired teachers, anxious to get to their own rooms, ^{but} by requested by the Head to entertain the foreign guest, or I would be taken in the School Car back to the suburban station and so home by train. Thoughts would come to me as I whizzed through the darkness. What kind of an impression had I made? Would they really be interested enough to give us money? My attitude was usually one of weariness and regret. Back at my small office, I would send out feelers to the schools I had visited. If Fortune were kind I would perhaps get a check. More often that not, these would come letters,

saying how interested they all had been, what a good work the Asiatic College was doing, but ^{there were so many other demands} the war made so many demands, that this year they could give us nothing. Perhaps another year..... and the poor propagandist would lie awake half the night cursing the Fates.

There were more extended trips than to suburban stations. I tasted the pleasures of the "Road". Certainly there were moments, many moments, especially when I forgot I was a propagandist and dreamed I was only a student of humanity, that were full of real delight. I visited Philadelphia and was enchanted with the quant, narrow, side streets, with their houses tumbling out their occupants immediately upon the narrow pavements; with the sedate, solid, sober atmosphere of the place. And then there was Boston! Thought I, "To be able to see Boston every few months, that's something. Perhaps propagandizing has its compensations after all". I never could cross the Common, without thinking of the Pilgrim Fathers. Perhaps it was because usually the snow was on the ground and a most bitter wind was blowing. Perhaps it was only because in my childhood in Asia, I had looked across the ocean at little Massachusetts with eyes that could see only the romance of history and none of the marks of modernity in its fine old city. At any rate there was the sensation. Even if I were bent upon a lecture and had to get across the Common to deliver it, I could have a delicious brief communion with the ghosts of Puritan worthies on the way.

My brief visits in these cities as well as in others were spent in a variety of hostelries. Sometimes I was independent and businesslike and stayed at a Club, where I felt affluent but too extravagant. At other times, following a lean season of chacks, I would go to the Y.W.C.A, refuge of the unfortunate and impoverished. As a contrast to this, there were times when I must needs be very polite and informative as a ^{guest} ~~gust~~ for several days, of a Trustee. On these days, as we say in the East, my soul was squeezed. As I came downstairs to dinner in an awesome dining room, feeling shabby in my one evening dress, wondering whether my slippers were very conspicuously old-fashioned, remembering with a start that I had forgotten to look at my back hair before I came down,

and hoping my hostess would not introduce me to everybody as "my guest from Asia", which she invariably did, leaving me confronted with an astonished individual, who looked at me as though I were some unwholesome curiosity---on these occasions, I say, I had an overwhelming nostalgia for my cheap little room at the Y.W.C.A. and the noisey cafeteria, where I was surrounded by indifferent Maisies and Sadies. You see, Gentle Reader, do you not, that I was the very last person to be a propagandist. I remember very well one horrible week spent in the costly mansion of the worldly Mrs. X. She meant well, poor lady, I have not a doubt. And how was she to know that my soul was squeezed? I gave her no indication. Following my accepted notion of the duties of a humble propagandist, I beamed at her continuously. I talked Asia. I dwelt upon the Orient. I persuaded her and almost myself that my whole life was bound up in the Asiatic College. In turn I listened to her talk. I feigned interest in her spoilt, idle, purposeless daughters. I sympathized when she complained of the mismanagement of the expensive school they were attending, and I tried not to be noticeably depressed when she and her youngest^{er} daughter quarreled as to who was to have the car that afternoon. The week was an eternity. It came to an end, as all things do, good and bad alike. It was only when her check came into the office that I felt that my visit after all had its brighter side.

Of course I visited the colleges. They were almost all very beautiful to look upon---Wellesley, Vassar, Smith, Wells, Mt. Holyoke. I took them all in. My first feeling was one of gratitude that these hurrying young college students should listen so patiently, so eagerly to what I had to say on Asia. I found them as I grew to know them, very much the same, and ridiculously youthful. I can think of nothing lovelier than Northampton in the spring time, with the grass soft and green under your feet and the campus alive with youth, dark and fair, short and tall, in gay sweaters; or Bryn Mawr in the autumn with the vines turning red and gold upon the cloistered halls and the swishing of the yellow leaves as you walk the campus paths.

My most adventurous journey was to Ohio. Perhaps, Gentle Reader, you cannot associate in your mind, Adventure and Ohio. But if you were born in Asia, if you had never known any part of America but a small strip on the eastern coast, you would perhaps, like me, think of a visit to the hinterland as something of an episode in your career. Not that I was wildly excited. The anchor of my propagandizing program, only too securely kept my spirit from soaring. It was, however, with a slight tremor of amused anticipation that I took my place in the Pullman car at the Grand Central Station on a certain day in early November.

In Ohio, a place somewhat formidable to my mind, by reason of its unfamiliarity, I sought always a lodging at the Y.W.C.A. I fell upon the disarming habit of having to share my room with other sojourners. They changed frequently. Having made the acquaintance of a Jennie, the night before, I ~~awoke~~ next morning to find a Miss Schultz in the bed in ~~the~~ corner, looking at me with hostile eyes. However, these were details soon forgotten.

I confess I found Ohio flat, flat as to country, flat as to people. I say this with no reflection upon their hospitality, for I found here a cordial welcome as I found everywhere in big hearted America. But the flatness and the commercialism depressed me unspeakably and I constantly congratulated myself that I had only come for a short pilgrimage after all.

The students of Ohio took kindly to my propagandizing. Notwithstanding a somewhat vague expression upon their countenances, when I mentioned an Asiatic metropolis, they were interested in the Orient. They were always kind and always very polite. At one college, they even asked me, thinking I must needs have a theological training as I came from a foreign strand, to say the College Blessing at breakfast, at which I was so taken aback by surprise that I almost disgraced myself and my College by making inarticulate noises.

At one college, I met Euphemia Chaffinch ~~Tike~~, whose name so took my fancy that I shall never forget it. Euphemia came to visit me in the state

guest room where I had been gently deposited for the night, after my meeting. She came in apologetically asking for a little chat. I offered her an old fashioned rocking chair, in which she settled herself, spreading her hands upon the arms. She was on the shady side of fifty, tall, very angular, very institutional. She had graduated from this same college, when it was only a school and "everyone did the housework, you know." She confessed she was immensely interested in the Orient and I found to my amazement that as a child she had given her pennies to a reverend missionary in her home town (was it Memphis or Cairo?) who had preached the word in my own Asiatic City. For more than twenty years she had been matron of this college. She was Ohio through and through. She stood at the door a moment before she turned to go and said: "Perhaps I'll come abroad some day. But I guess not. My place is here. I've been feeding these girls for twenty-two years and little old Ohio looks pretty good to me!"

I visited the three important Ohio cities, Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati. Oh yes, and there was Akron! Akron, full of rubber and foreigners a city built in a valley and on a hill, the poor sweating in the valley, the rich living in resplendent mansions on the hill. My associations with Akron were painful. To begin with, being unused to the very puzzling system of two kinds of time, Eastern and Central which holds good in northern Ohio, I started from Cleveland, by electric car at an early hour of the morning to find upon arriving at Akron that the clock had not budged, that it was still the same early hour, far too early for any decent university exercises to be in progress. I was deposited in the middle of a narrow street, which to my nervous eye seemed at that early hour in the morning, full of spitting Italians and Bohemians, and it was only after consulting with a policeman, whom I had some difficulty in finding, that I ~~was~~^{g-} put on the road to my appointed place of lecture.

I cannot think of Ohio except from an educational point of view. I close my eyes and see rows and rows of colleges, each more moral than the last, rows and rows of trolley cars swinging through flat brown fields, and rows and rows of interested students asking intimate questions about my life in Asia.

This reaching students was only part of my work. There were other things to be done. I must call on the Rich. The Rich of course were never glad to see me but some few were very kind and gave me an appointment. Without some kind of introduction, I refused to go. It was here that my usually plastic nature absolutely balked. Even so, with a definite engagement to call for the avowed purpose of arousing interest and abstracting money, I needed my stock of courage. Sometimes for days before, I ~~was~~ obliged to go through the process of screwing it up. If I happened to be unusually apprehensive, I would have dreams about it at night. I would see myself being peremptorily ejected from marble halls by a wrathful maid, or being shown the door, gently but firmly by a haughty and be-powdered butler. These things fortunately never happened except in my dreams. On the whole, in justice let it be said, the Rich were very kind and much more tolerant than I would have been in their place.

One gentle little lady I remember with a heart full of gratitude. She lived in a great house on Madison Avenue in its most fashionable district. I saw her coming down the awe-inspiring staircase, dressed as simply and as modestly as if she were a hardworking propagandist herself. She interviewed me in the drawing room which fairly dazzled my unaccustomed eyes with its brocade hangings, expensive paintings and high ceiling. She was genuinely interested and sympathetic and gave me a generous check. I could have ^{stretched it to my forehead} kissed her hand when I left, as we do in the East, though I am sure she would have been horrified. While I was grateful, exceedingly grateful for her sympathy and pleased at my own success, as I walked away down Madison Avenue, I had a sneaking feeling that I had obtained that money under false pretences and that I ~~was~~ not earning an honest living. Such are the pangs of a propagandist!

There were other variations to my theme---people to be cultivated, ugly ^{but} and influential dowagers to be cajoled, boring professors to be humored, committee meetings, reports, associations, all to be gone through with. I have a deep-rooted aversion for the "organizing female" and yet as a propagandist for the Asiatic College, it was my duty to seek her out and put her in ^{such} a position ~~in~~ that

her special talents might have full sway. I grew to lose my simple faith in mankind, my usual appraisal of my fellow citizen. When I made a new acquaintance, I would ask myself: "Has he any money to give the College?" "Will he be interested in the status of oriental women?" "Or is he poor and not worth cultivating?" Thus, oh, thus, Gentle Reader, did I smirch my soul for the benefit of the Asiatic College.

At last my exile came to an end. I had done with propagandizing. I shall never ask a soul again for a favor, nor for his money, nor for an ounce of his interest. I do not care a red cent whether he likes the Asiatic College or not. For I have turned my face towards my beloved land of the Rising Sun and there I shall spend my days and never, never, never propagandize again.

TO APPEAR ANONYMOUSLY.

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