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FARM AND FACTORY IN CHINA

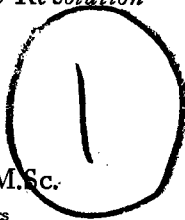
FARM AND FACTORY IN CHINA

Aspects of the Industrial Revolution

BY

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**TO MY FELLOW-STUDENTS
OF CHINA
CHINESE AND FOREIGN**

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FOREWORD

TWENTY years ago, the writer¹ and a Chinese friend visited a prosperous match factory. They were taken first to a large room in which young boys, standing at long benches, were packing matches into boxes. The process was accompanied by many flashes, as the matches, which were of the strike-anywhere variety, ignited through friction. Protection from fire, both for the boys' hands and for the building, was woefully primitive. Passing on, the visitors rapidly came to the mixing-room, where the phosphorus, together with the other ingredients, was stirred into glue to form the material for the heads of the matches. The room was a small one, with almost no ventilation; the phosphorus was the yellow (white) kind, which, unlike the inert red form, is intensely active and poisonous. For this reason its use is now widely prohibited.²

As the phosphorus was stirred in, in open mortars on a table in the centre of the room, frequent bursts of flame formed puffs of white fume. No hoods were provided, nor any artificial draught, and the air was thick and nauseating. When questioned as to the occurrence of phossy-

¹ Then a teacher of chemistry in China, with previous industrial experience in Lancashire.

² See p. 100.

jaw among the workers, the manager, a kindly man who had learnt the industry in Japan, confessed to having known fatal cases in the latter country and admitted that some of his own men had been obliged to give up work in his factory. He listened readily to information as to the use of red, non-poisonous phosphorus and, failing that, as to means for drawing off the fumes. In the latter respect considerable improvements were effected.

The making up of the match-boxes was done outside the factory by women and children, despite the fact that most of the employees in the factory itself were small boys, who did all but the heaviest work. Strips of wood, nicked at the right places, and strips of paper, were prepared on the premises, but the folding and pasting together were done in the homes at incredibly low rates. Here was a factory which was regarded in the immediate neighbourhood as a godsend, finding employment for many, reducing poverty and almost abolishing begging. Yet in it were exemplified all the evils of unregulated child-labour, the conditions which lead to "sweating," and lack of protection from the dangers of a trade particularly injurious to health.

This incident may serve to raise the questions : What is happening in China in the sphere of industry ? What does the process of being drawn into the main stream of the world's economic life mean for the people of this eastern land ? What, in its turn, does the line of China's in-

dustrial development mean for the world at large ?

The China of to-day is full of striking contrasts, of mediæval and modern ; she forms the field of the most intensive communist propaganda. Her people are making trial of modern industrial methods and fashioning a new industrial philosophy at a time when she has not only broken from her old moorings but is adrift on an as yet—to her—uncharted sea. Her strongest driving power is a passionate nationalism—and her economic problems bristle with international complications. How intimately the industrial phases of her changing life are bound up with the stirring and tragic events of recent years must be clear to all. We need only remind ourselves, to take one example, that the “Shanghai incident” of 30th May 1925 occurred in the course of a demonstration against the killing of a Chinese workman by his Japanese foreman. It is perhaps less clearly realized how profoundly economic change is transforming the social institutions in China and the daily life of her people.

The forces moulding modern China cannot be estimated without some knowledge of the traditional economy handed down from the past. This brief study accordingly begins with the village peasant and the handicraftsman of old, but still existing, China. The imaginative effort to enter into the simple life of these people who constitute some of the finest of human material,

is one of the essential conditions for understanding the needs and the tendencies of the present. The chief purpose of the book is to contribute something, however small, to such an understanding.