

From "H. Ec." to Geisha Girls and Russian Refugees

Sarah Field's Experiences in Japanese Schools and Russian War Work

By JEANETTE BEYER



Sarah Field as she replenishes a real Japanese charcoal stove.

HOW WOULD you like to attend the Emperor of Japan's Garden Party, midst banks and banks of chrysanthemums, arched bridges, waterfalls, white palaces, and glowing maples, where ladies were dressed in kimonos, and men wore silk hats?

How would you like to live in the land of geisha girls and plum blossoms, where the crooked streets are four feet wide? How would you like to feed a hospital full of nurses, doctors, and sick Sammies, in a strange Russian city, with Russian and Chinese cooks, or instruct a class of some twenty giggling, black-headed, Japanese girls in the intricacies of Swiss steak or American apple sauce?

Such have been the experiences of Miss Sarah Field of Burlington, Iowa, a graduate from Iowa State College in the year 1914, who has returned to the States after five years in the Orient.

After one year in a Japanese language school in Tokyo, Miss Field was loaned by the Congregational Mission Board to the American Red Cross, who sent her to Vladivostok, Russia, as dietitian in a large hospital. After the crisis of the Red Cross war work had passed she returned to the language school in Tokyo, and in September, 1921, she was able to take up her real work as a teacher of Home Economics in Kobe College, in Kobe, a seaport in Japan.

Her story of these experiences is told best by excerpts from her own letters. Describing her first days in Tokyo, she says:

"How you would enjoy language school! The first day we learned to write and pronounce the 'cana' characters for a, ka, sa, ta, and na. It is quite a side-splitting affair to hear two teachers go through a class of twenty-five, ejaculating "a! A!" at each pupil, echoed by each in return. We sound like a tree full of monstrous Japanese crows."

But not all Miss Field's time was spent in language school. There were many walks through those narrow, tortuous streets, and visits to those "funny, brown open-fronted shops", where the mysteries and splendor of the Orient was laid before her—brilliant silk kimonos with strange Japanese characters and symbols which told stranger stories in their embroideries; and lacquer, old teakwood, and jade in many unusual forms. Then there were missionary meetings and the church, where she met the wonderful people with whom she was soon to work.

And soon came the invitation to the Emperor's garden party.

On the day of days Miss Field found herself with her language school friends awaiting the arrival of the Emperor.

"Then came the stirring strains of Kimigaya, and the gold-braided footman at the corner set his patent leather pumps together and elevated his chin. Around the corner came two gayer footmen—heralds, I suppose—and then all alone walked the Emperor. His frock coat blew wide in the wind, as he kept his calm, interested face turned toward his guests as he reviewed them. As he passed, feminine heads were bowing, and mine did, too, tho my eyes were looking from under the edge of my hat as hard as ever they could. I have a memory of a slender, erect figure, a pleasant, alert face crossed by a big moustache, and iron-gray hair.

"Three paces behind followed the Empress, in a European dress of pale green and a broad hat and feathers of the same shade. An older woman in deep lavender stubbed along just behind the Empress, the Queen mother, perhaps. All the women walk as if they were trying to fall uphill, as they have to walk to keep on the zori and geta that have only strings to hold them. The rest of the women in the procession walked fairly well. Most of them wore silk or velvet gowns of European cut very becomingly, but among them were a few in the old regulation court costume. That consisted of a highly colored kimono coat, bright green or purple, with sleeves both wide and long enough to reach to the knees, spread open to show the lining of pink or blue, and under that, scarlet silk divided skirts, beneath which scarlet slippers to match popped in and out. Their hair was tied at the nape of the neck and hung down their backs. A few khaki-clad soldiers marched with these gayly dressed ladies, and helped to make it the gorgeous sight it was."

Into all this splendor and beauty of Old Japan came the call of the Red Cross for help in war-ridden Russia. And so struggles with strangeness began all over again, strange city, strange people, strange language. But it was not long before Miss Field, with good Ames spirit and training behind her, with the help of the few interpreters, was making good in Vladivostok as dietitian for the large Russian hospital full of refugee women and babies. Of this, Miss Field says:

"This Russian food business is very easy, tho, now that I have it down to a sys-

tem. System calls for soup every other day for dinner, followed by meat and cereal, bread and tea. The in-between nights we have either "kotlettes," which are Hamburgers with an extra lot of bread crumbs, or goulash, or bean porridge. If it isn't fish, the patients on "soft" diet can't have it and have milk toast and soft-boiled eggs instead. And the "liquid" diet folks have boullion and gruel or milk "kisell," which is a thin potato starch pudding.

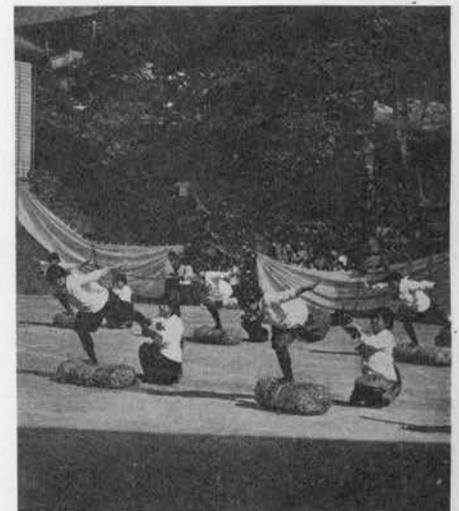
"The vegetable shops are a constant source of delight to me. There is always something I have never seen before, whether it is dirty seaweed that I have not courage to buy, tho I can eat it when it is cooked (if I have to), or dried mushrooms that look for all the world like dirty bits of shavings, or salt beets, or fresh Chinese cabbage that looks like blanched and headed chard, or pickled spinach. As we went down the narrow lanes each merchant vied with the next in telling us of the goodness of his wares,—lovely, black satin-gowned, greasy men in skull caps and pigtails. Local color is certainly laid on thick around here."

Nine months of this strange life, then the big rush of the Red Cross being over, Miss Field went back to Tokyo and again took up the difficult study of Japanese.

After two more years of language school, Miss Field found herself able to bow as low, sit on her feet as long, and drink tea as daintily from a blue handleless cup as the politest of Japanese society required, not omitting her ability to talk and understand a great deal of the language spoken about her. So on September, 1921, she began her real work, Ames training again coming into play, as instructor of Home Economics in Kobe College.

Now Sarah Field is no longer a fanciful Japanese lady, a Russian dietitian, nor even a foreign school teacher. For

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Modern Woman Kobe College Girls taking their "daily dozes."

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the present she is a plain American, an I. S. C. graduate, living in the United States. She recently visited Ames, addressing the Middle Western Congregational Woman's Missionary society, coming here from Cleveland, where she had attended a similar meeting.

This winter she will remain in the States studying dietetics in some American University, not yet decided upon, and doing research work in Japanese foods so that when she returns to Kobe in the summer she can tell all those little "sat-in-haired, velvet-cheeked" homemakers how we do it in America.

Ervilla Masters is teaching home economics in the National Bible Training school in Des Moines.

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