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“And the Villages thereof”



THE HOPE OF CHINA

Frontispiece]

[Photo: McTavish & Co., Shanghai

“And the Villages thereof”

BY

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“AND THE VILLAGES THEREOF”

CHAPTER I

“A SOWER WENT FORTH”

IT is a glorious autumn morning, the sky a cloudless blue and the air cool, fresh, and exhilarating. We are ready early for our walk to the mountain villages.

In such air, under such a sky, bathed in such sunshine, with hearts overflowing with the gladness and joy of being entrusted with the “unsearchable riches” of the blessed Gospel, we start on our way, armed with Bibles and pictures for a day’s preaching. We are taking no food with us, preferring to trust to the hospitality of the village; even if we should find our trust misplaced, we still have “food to eat that they know not of.”

The road winds round and round a mountain, with rice-fields on our left hand; the rice is almost ripe, but looks as if it badly needs the rain to swell the grain. Every blade of grass is tipped with vermilion, the bracken is turning brown and gold, and every shrub has its own distinct colour and beauty. The mountain is covered with pine and furze, and the way is very lovely.

Somehow these Chinese village roads, as they wind

in and out amongst the mountains, are captivating. We are always wanting to see what is round the corner ; turning corners has the greatest fascination, and they draw us on and on. At every corner turned there lies a new picture spread before us, with here and there a peep of a far-away village or hamlet, hidden amongst the trees, or nestling cosily at the foot of a mountain. Again, of a sudden we are just in front of another without any warning whatever, except, it may be, the grunt of an old mother-pig, who is venerable and wise enough to be allowed to stray of her own sweet will, since she can be trusted to find her way back by supper-time !

Sometimes our way leads straight up a mountain pass, on and on, up and up, till we reach a small rest-house on the brow of the hill, with two seats and a roof. Blessed rest-houses ! How thankfully we have sunk on to a seat, after a long and weary pull up under a blazing Chinese sun ! These rest-houses have been built, in the spirit of true philanthropy, by kindly men and women who have wished to do some good deed during their lives. How many travellers have rested awhile under their cool shade, before passing down the mountain on the other side !

Sometimes the stone steps up and down these mountain passes are worn away by the pressure of thousands and thousands of Chinese feet in bygone years.

Looking down the pass, there is often no village to be seen, no solitary houses even—nothing but peak after peak, with valleys between, stretching away to the horizon.

Everything is on such a big scale, everything suggests width and grandeur—with here and there rocks and

craggs, and tiny streams rushing so swiftly down over the rocks and precipices that they have become waterfalls. As we walk along, the scenery suggests topics of conversation, so that the road is often shortened for us.

A mountain road suggests tigers, and tiger stories become the order of the day ; if we are fortunate enough to have a local woman as guide, we may hear the most interesting and thrilling tales.

One such guide pointed out a mountain on our right, covered with scrub and furze. “That is the mountain where the tigers hide,” she said. “They come down to the village and carry away the pigs. One night, last winter, we were awakened at midnight by the screams of a pig. ‘A tiger!’ said the men, and they got up and rushed out, shouting at the top of their voices, to drive away the brute. They followed the sound of the pig’s screams along the road, the sound getting farther and farther away, and were just in time to see the tiger drop his prey in a field, and flee away to the mountain. Alas! the pig had been ‘bitten dead.’”

Another tale was that of a farmer, who on market-day had bought a small pig for three or four dollars ; he was a poor man and could ill spare the money.

One night the little pig disappeared, and a search was made ; at last its head and tail were found on a mountain—the rest had been eaten by a wolf !

A little Chinese girl told me a story, all in rhyme. It was about a man who was surprised one night by the visit of a very bold tiger indeed ! The man and the tiger had a long conversation, the man protesting against the lack of manners shown by so noble a beast

in breaking into his house uninvited. The child repeated the story so fast in her pretty, lisping way that to this day I cannot tell how it ended—whether the tiger ate up the man, or the man the tiger, but I think it was the latter—as becometh Topsy-Turvy Land!

At any rate, by the time we reached this point we had come to a corner of the road where there was a fairly large field, the rice looking as if it had been very carelessly reaped. “Look,” she said, “a few nights ago that field of rice was cut down, threshed, and carried away by thieves. In the morning, when the farmer came out to see if it were ripe, he found nothing but stumps; truly, these thieves are wicked and bold.”

Sometimes even tiger stories hold real tragedy in them. One that was told us concerned three little brothers, who, with other boys, had been sent to the hills to cut wood for firing. On returning home with their loads the youngest of them was missing; the two elder brothers went back to the hills to look for him, and found him standing as if petrified, staring with glazed eyes into the brushwood close by. The brothers called him, but he seemed unable to move for fear. They went up to him, and each of them took a hand and tried to coax the little fellow to come with them. Suddenly a tiger sprang out of the brushwood, seized him, carried him off, and he was never heard of again.

Another tiger story is that of a small boy walking with his father up amongst the hills one day, in the same district. A tiger sprang out, seized the boy, and carried him off in front of his father's eyes. The father followed quickly, shouting loudly all the way to

make the creature let go its hold, which it did. The boy was rescued unharmed, except for some bad scratches on his shoulder.

We are getting close to our first village now ; it is just off the road, a tiny hamlet, nestling in a hollow of the hills. As we draw near, the dogs saunter out to look at us ; most inhospitable brutes they are. I am sure our Western dogs would blush with shame to call them “brothers” ! The Chinese never seem afraid of them, but to me it has always been hard to maintain an appearance of calm with several disreputable and wolf-like dogs barking at my heels.

Before entering the village we pause a moment, our hearts raised in prayer for the help so badly needed—so surely supplied.

Then we enter the doorway of perhaps the very first house in the village, the woman with us first calling out in a friendly voice, “Any woman at home ?” As a rule, the house-mother invites us to come in, and a chair, which badly needs washing, is dusted, and we are invited to sit down. Sometimes a forbidding-looking woman will come forward and say, “You will not preach here ; we have no time to listen to you,” in which case we apologise for the intrusion, and must needs go on to the next house.

Here we get a warm welcome. Stools are brought forward, and wiped clean, and we sit down, first saying, “Please invite all the neighbours to come in here too, then all can hear us preach.” There is much hustling around, and all disappear to the kitchen, to reappear later with tiny cups of most refreshing tea ; sometimes it is quite cold, sometimes freshly brewed for us, and sometimes only made with warm water (none

too clean at that!), with a little black sugar stirred into it!

Sometimes the cups are nicely washed, sometimes they are very dirty, but *always* we drink it. We surely must—or give offence, and maybe spoil our opportunity of winning their friendship and attention to our message.

After this the neighbours gather, and often we have a delightfully interested crowd, but oh! if only they need not bring the babies! There will probably be some "stony ground" hearers, and, truth to tell, they are most encouraging for the time being; we feel so grateful to them for their eager acceptance of the message, which keeps us from being "weary in well-doing"; besides, we can never *really* tell, can we, until the "Harvest Home"?

I remember once, coming from a day's work in a village, I was feeling tired out, and, if one dare admit it, just a wee bit despondent too, because it had seemed a bad preaching opportunity.

As we walked along the mountain road, I caught sight of a glint of pink, partly hidden in the crevice of a big overhanging rock. A closer look revealed such a beautiful sight! There was a little, cool, dark, damp cave, all covered with the tiniest, most exquisite pale pink rock-begonias, each flower but a few inches high, and quite perfect. I gathered a large bunch, but before reaching our lodgings, the delicate flowers had drooped and died. They had done their bit that day—they had given us joy and shortened the road. They were like the "stony ground" hearers, who give us hope and lighten our load, as we go from village to village.

The Biblewoman is explaining the absolute futility

of idol worship to a crowd of women, and by way of illustration she tells the story of what has happened in another place quite lately: “We passed by a street where there used to be a little temple, with dwelling-houses beside it, but lo! they were gone, and an empty desert space was there instead. What had occurred? In the sixth month, when the villagers were having theatricals before the idol shrine, in order to please the idol spirit, a spark of fire was blown on to the dry timbers, the shrine was in a blaze in a few moments, the fire spread to the neighbouring houses, right and left, and all were burnt down.”

“Where are the idols now?” asks the Biblewoman. Some one answered, “Oh! the idols flew away to heaven!” There is a great deal of amusement at this story, but the Biblewoman drives her point well home, saying, “Why, the idols could not protect themselves, or the shrine in which they dwelt; how could they protect you?”

“True, true,” says an old woman; “I knew a woman once who worshipped idols with such a hot heart that she worshipped herself dead! They are no good; I do not believe in them.”

They are hushed into quiet for a little while, when the story of the Lord Jesus is told. His love in coming to earth; His dying, the Just for the unjust; His presence and work for us in glory now; yes, and His coming again; the invitation to all to “Come,” and His promise to save all who respond by faith—these are simply explained as if to little children. “He had a good heart to die for us,” “His merit is very great,” “We must worship Him,” “We must remember Him,” are some of the comments on the story, and we leave that particular house, with the

encouraging words ringing in our ears : “ We won’t forget, we will remember ; come and tell us again.”

Then on a mile or two, to the next village. There is a man here who has begun to worship God, so we seek out his house first.

He is not at home, and his wife seems rather hopeless, so we look round for a better opportunity of getting a few women together. We find a little group round the corner, out in the open, sitting on a pile of stones ; we sit down with them and begin to chat. Presently a very angry-looking old man appears, asks what we want, and when we tell him, swings his arms about, and in a loud, excited voice, tells us that we are not wanted there, as he and the rest of the village are all idolaters, and intend to remain so. The Biblewoman rises from her seat, and tells him we are not there to hurt or harm any one, but to bring to them the doctrine of the True God. “ We do not believe in any other gods but the idols,” he answered ; “ they are good enough for us.”

“ What about the next life ? ” she asks. “ The next life must take care of itself,” is the answer. The women sitting by tell him to be quiet, and allow them to hear “ the Doctrine.” “ You need not listen, but you need not prevent our listening,” they say. Then, with many an interruption from this terrible old man, the women hear something of the love of God, of the beauty of heaven, and in spite of the old man’s many protests and disapproval, we sing to them, “ There is a Happy Land,” and afterwards explain each verse, sentence by sentence. “ Is it possible any one can get to heaven ? ” they ask ; while another exclaims, “ Yes, that doctrine is good ; if only we could obey it there would be happiness.”

A little later we go on to another house, and to our dismay this same old man is sitting solemnly in state in the guest-hall—in his very own house! He rises quickly, saying, “Don’t preach here; go inside to that inner guest-hall and preach to them.” And we are only too glad to go!

As we leave the village, on our way back to our lodgings, we meet him yet again, and this time I say to him, “Honoured sir, this is the third time we have met to-day; I hope we may meet yet again in the Better Land.” He points his hand with a majestic gesture towards the road leading away from the village. “Slowly, slowly go!” he says solemnly, and so we leave him.

It is evening; we are back again in our rather dreary little loft, feeling happy, but tired out, both physically and spiritually, because the whole day has been a battling with the unseen forces of evil.

The Biblewoman is downstairs cooking our supper, and talking at the same time to our hostess—a heathen woman. In the quiet evening hour their voices reach me. Our hostess is speaking: “Tell the Sister to pray for my little son. I want him to become a son of God, too.” Then comes the answer, “What about yourself? You also must become a child of God, and then you can pray for your son yourself.” With the reply, “I have no time yet; in a year or two, when my children are older, I also will become a Christian.”

She wants her children to become strong, happy, and good, and it may be that in this desire she herself is not far from the Kingdom.

Quite close to us there is a delicate, weak woman, who has heard a little of “the Doctrine,” and is be-

ginning to see a glimmer of the Light of God. We had a small gathering of women in her house, with a short gospel service and prayer. She said next day, “Do pray for me, that God may make me quite strong ; I feel so much better to-day after our prayer and worship yesterday.”

We cannot always discern the soil, nor can we know which seed will grow up, but it is ours to sow it, plentifully and ungrudgingly.

CHAPTER II

AMONG THORNS

WE have had a most delightful chair-ride to-day in the sweet spring air; all the way the banks by the roadside and the mountains have been covered with many kinds of shrubs with snow-white blossoms, masses of flaming azalea, and all the young budding things of early spring; but the beauty ended when the journey ended—in a dilapidated and dirty house. We have two downstairs rooms, and mine opens straight into the weather-well; which means, since there has been much rain lately, that the air of our rooms is damp and musty, and things cling to one's hand.

The weather-well is situated at the end of the guest-hall. It is open to the heavens, and all the light and air for the rest of the house comes from there. I walk out of my little room, and one stone step leads into the guest-hall. This has no furniture except the carved wooden shelf where the idols sit, beneath which is what is called the "worship" or "sacred" table; here idol prayers are offered, incense sticks lighted, and rice offerings made to the idols.

There is no chair in the guest-hall, because the owners are poor, but there are backless, back-aching, back-breaking, wooden stools and benches.

The household pets and other animals roam in and out at their own sweet will, but happily there is a

young daughter-in-law who occasionally whisks round with a broom.

The village has a population of about two hundred families, and is the centre of a nest of other villages and hamlets, within a radius of eight or ten miles. There is a street where you can buy nothing you want, and everything you don't want. On market-days, which occur regularly every five days, the whole countryside seems to congregate here, and the village street awakes from its peaceful dreaming to become a lively thoroughfare, and one can actually buy a few needed articles of food. Some twenty years ago this was an important place, but a great fire, which was followed by much looting (one of the scourges of China), reduced the village to about half its size, and the sites where large houses once stood are now rubbish heaps.

"Are there many rich families in this village?" I asked. "Oh yes; before the great fire all were more or less rich, but now we have only just enough to eat."

Everything dates from the "great fire"; they reckon their ages from that event, saying "He or she was such-and-such an age the year of the great fire." It was *the* big thing in the history of that little village.

Such is the immediate setting of the thorny-ground sowing in this particular district.

It is afternoon, and we are giving a little gramophone entertainment to the women of the village. We have found it so difficult to get them together for a gospel meeting that we arrange this in order to obtain a good opportunity for preaching, and also to make friends and get them into the habit of coming. Special invitations have been sent to all the women, with an added and important note, "No men invited!" Very

soon a band of little boys arrives, and one of them (evidently selected as spokesman) says, with a most fascinating smile, "We hear there is an 'ocean instrument' going to sing; may we come and listen?" How can we refuse? So they are allowed to remain, conditionally, on their best behaviour.

The women and children arrive in swarms! The entertainment begins with a song record—"A Happy New Year." The meaning of the words has to be first explained and then translated into Chinese for them, as all the records are in English. Then tea and sweets are handed round, and many are the pretty and appreciative remarks made by one and another. Then a laughing-song is given, and they are told that it will not be translated, since if they listen carefully all will understand. It is interesting to watch their faces—at first absolutely stolid and expressionless, but as they realise the nature of the song, expressions slowly change, faces light up, and presently all are laughing more loudly even than the singer. Later, a record made of a captive nightingale is put on, and their pleasure is delightful to see, especially when the real birdies, nesting in the high roof of the guest-hall, join in the chorus!

This gramophone entertainment was only an experiment, and it did a good work then, though I doubt if we should use it again in that way.

When this part was over, and our visitors had quieted down, we sang a hymn, and began our service. There were three short addresses given, all of which were listened to with keen interest and respect.

While the gospel story was being told and explained, a young woman sitting close to us continually heaved big sighs; she had a rather sullen, dissatisfied-looking

face, but as one listened to her life-story, sobbed out from the depths of her sad heart when our meeting was over, we felt that here was a thorny patch indeed. Her path in life was a very difficult one, beset with fierce temptations. She told us that her husband was an actor, living a loose, selfish life, roaming from place to place, earning much money, and spending it on gambling, opium-smoking, and other sin, seldom coming home and neither caring nor providing for his wife and family.

She had been left to live as best she could—by sewing, making shoes, cooking, and washing for others; and was always considered a burden by her husband's family. This young woman has had two children; one, a girl, married and living elsewhere, the other a little son, the hope and joy of her troubled life, who had died suddenly the previous year. She seems interested in the gospel message, and has caught a far-off glimpse of the peace and beauty that a Christian life may mean, but the cares of this world and the many thorns and difficulties in the way are choking the good seed.

Our meeting ended, our guests scattered to their homes again. I went for a climb in the pure air of the hills at the back of the village. Standing there on the height, and looking down on the houses below, suddenly, from one of them, there came the wail of a woman in trouble. I went quickly to see what was wrong, and if there were any help needed, and found one of the women who had been at our service, sitting in front of the kitchen stove, wailing and weeping and swaying her body to and fro; the words I heard were, “He wants me to die, he wants me to die!” She and her husband had been quarrelling, and he had struck

her. Oh! the ground of these Chinese women's hearts is so full of little thorns that prick and draw blood, as well as of the many big thorns and strongly rooted weeds, that hurt and choke and hinder; in many cases the good seed never gets a chance.

We have had a most delightful Sunday, with a proper Church service held by the evangelist, who came over to us for the week-end from "Pine River City"—our own town of Sungki. Some "beginning worshippers" from eight of the near villages, as well as from our own villages, attended, and the guest-hall was quite filled. We borrowed stools and forms from all the neighbours, and some of the women brought their own little stools with them, as they do when they go to the theatre. The evangelist stood in front of the idol shrine, beside the "idol worship table," and from there conducted the Church service, morning, afternoon, and night. Our host's wife is still a devoted idol worshipper, as yet unwilling to change, but she says she is quite pleased that her husband should worship God.

When the afternoon service was over, she accompanied me for a little walk up on the hill. "Come and see the world," she said, and truly from the top there was a most glorious panorama spread out before us. She pointed to a thick, dark patch of forest on the slope of the opposite hill, and said, "That forest protects the village, and no one must cut any of the wood down for any purpose whatever, or the luck of the village would flee away."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because the Dragon lives underneath," she replied, "and he would be angry if he were disturbed."

Then she spoke of her own family and life, and said that she was not prepared to worship God yet, for she had some idols' vows not yet fulfilled, nor had she accumulated sufficient merit to ensure a happy resting-place in the next life, but added, "I think in a year's time I shall begin to worship your God."

Then we came back to the house, and presently she made some "flower cakes" of the snow-white petals of the wild rose, and gave us some to eat. One would think such cakes would be delicious, like angels' food indeed, but after testing them, I am quite willing to forgo my share!

Dusk was closing in, and the time for the usual evening idol worship drew near. Our hostess stood in front of her beloved idols, and, with her hands clasped reverently, bowed to the ground many times; then she lighted several candles and placed them on the sacred shelf in front of the idols, walking back and forth to the front door with the lighted incense sticks in her hands, waving them up and down, saying softly, "Come back, come back. These people have rented half the house; we cannot hinder them worshipping their God. Pardon, pardon, they also belong to you. Pardon, pardon!" She was pleading with the idols for pardon, because she had allowed the worship of God in her house. Is it not sowing among thorns?

There is another woman here beginning to worship God; she is so keen to learn, and comes some part of every day to be taught.

We came across her just at the crisis in her life, when she was planning to "ascend to the temple," as it is called, and become an idol devotee. We hope her face is turned Godwards and heavenwards now. One



BOYS GATHERING STICKS BY THE WAYSIDE

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day she did not come for her usual lesson, and as we were busy here and there with other women, it was almost dark before we remembered her. The Bible-woman went to her house, and found the enemy had been busy too, sowing tares behind our backs; the woman had almost made up her mind not to worship God after all.

It appears that one of the most opposed and bigoted temple devotees in the village had spent the whole afternoon trying to frighten her and dissuade her from the worship of God. She told her the most horrible stories about us—amongst other things, that we offered human sacrifices to God; that when we foreigners had finished building our house and school some years ago, in "Pine River City," we offered in sacrifice a boy and a girl; that several people were thrown down and buried through the fall of a wall, which was a sure sign of the anger of the gods. Was it any wonder that the glimmer of light in this woman's soul was clouded, and a set-back given to the beginning of her faith? "An enemy hath done this," while the soldiers were off guard and not at their post. We had thought she was "through," and "had let down our wings." If the alarm had not been sounded then, this woman might have been lost to the Kingdom of God. No wonder, oh, no wonder we are warned against the sower of the tares, and enjoined to be "sleepless unto prayer"!

CHAPTER III
SOME BY THE WAYSIDE—SOME AN
HUNDREDFOLD

IT was in the old days in Ching-ho, before we had a house to stay in or a church to worship in, when we could neither rent nor build because of the anti-foreign feeling. For many a long day it was all "wayside sowing," and truly the birds of the air seemed to pick up and carry away the seed, just as quickly as it fell.

In those days we got no invitations to "sit"; most of the sowing was done standing on the doorsteps—that is, when we were fortunate enough to *get* to the door before it was shut in our faces! The women were timid, and the children would scamper out of the way; often we overheard the expression, "She is ugly enough to frighten one."

One afternoon, as we were on our usual round, passing by a Government schoolhouse, we saw an old woman standing at the door. We came along, wondering whether she also would walk in and shut her door; but no, for as the Biblewoman accosted her with the customary greeting, "Have you eaten your dinner yet, old lady?" she answered politely, and invited us to "sit." She was quite old, looking long past seventy, with a gentle, kindly expression. Talking to her, she became friendly, and presently asked who we were and what was our business? The Bible-

woman took the opportunity of telling her that we were on the business of the King and had good news for her.

Another woman who, in the meantime, had come in said, "If you have good news for her, she is worthy of it, for she is a very good woman." Then the gospel of salvation was explained quietly and simply, and was listened to with rapt attention. Before we left her, she had promised to come to church the following Sunday. We explained where we lived, and invited her to remain all day and have dinner with us, so that she could have all the teaching possible in the one day.

It was our first real opening in Ching-ho, and we went back to the church-house with hope in our hearts at last.

The following Sunday, quite early, just as breakfast was finished, the old lady arrived; it had been a long walk for her, the latter part of the way being up steep steps to the hill at the back of the city—the only place people would rent to us. She proved to be the real good soil, and seemed, almost immediately, to give her heart to the Lord Jesus—just simply thanking Him for His love in dying for her, and for the forgiveness of her sins.

Sunday after Sunday saw her in her place at church, in the seat nearest to the preacher on the women's side—the only one there, except ourselves.

This old lady was a native of Ching-ho City, the first-fruits unto God from there—so precious to us, and how much more precious to the Saviour. She had been a well-known temple devotee, spending her days from the age of forty-five in going from temple to temple worshipping idols, and latterly was being

paid for saying prayers for sick people and others ; now she had finished accumulating merit, to obtain a good life in the next world.

After a time she consigned all her idols, idol prayers, and the red lacquer basket in which she kept them to the flames, and turned wholly to God.

She had one lapse back into heathenism when a friend of hers became very ill ; knowing that our old lady had been a noted devotee, the sick man's friends prevailed on her to pray once more to the idols for his recovery. She could not withstand their strong persuasions, and so once more, for a short time, she was back worshipping idols. But the Lord Jesus is not only the " Author " of our faith ; He is also the " Finisher," and He drew near and showed His child her sin and error.

She became suddenly very ill, and during those days of weakness was conscious of the chastening hand of the Lord and of His rebuke ; she repented and was healed. As soon as she was strong enough, she came to church again, and publicly confessed her lapse into idolatry, and her glad return to God. In token of her sincerity, thankfulness, and joy, she spread a feast and invited us all to partake, and from that time she was more than ever earnest in prayer and worship.

One day she startled me by the question, " Have you ever seen the Lord Jesus ? " I answered, " No, Church-mother, but I hope one day to see Him." " I often see Him," she said ; " He comes to my bedside at night, and talks to me in my dreams, and He is always dressed in a snow-white gown." She was baptized at the age of seventy-eight, and took the new name of " Heavenly Happiness." She only remained

with us for a few years, ripening and mellowing day by day for the heavenly garner, until the Lord called her home.

One day we were coming back from a visit to a village. We had had a trying and disappointing day; no one wanted to hear the message of salvation. Good news or bad news, it was all the same to them. They were utterly indifferent, and we had not even found any "stony ground" hearers to help us along. We stopped to rest for a while on a low broken-down wall by the wayside, where two other weary-looking women were already resting. One of them had that sad, yearning, troubled look, so often seen on thoughtful heathen faces. "You look tired, Mother," I said to her; "have you walked far to-day?" "Only to the temple in the village," she answered. Then she asked us where we were going, and what our business was, and the Biblewoman answered that we were telling the "good news" in the next village. "Oh! if you have good news, tell me, too," she said eagerly. Then the Biblewoman, in her own simple, direct, clear way once more told the good news of salvation. She listened earnestly, and then said that she was seeking for happiness in the next life, as she had had nothing but sorrow and sickness in this. We all walked back together slowly, in the twilight, and parted to go our several ways at the city gate; she wending her way to the temple where she resided, while we went on our way to the little church-house on the hill. Before parting she had told us exactly where she lived, and we had arranged to call for her on the following Sunday to bring her to church.

It was with light and happy hearts we mounted

the steps leading to our little house on the hill, and after our frugal supper of rice and vegetables, had a time of earnest prayer together; pleading that the seed sown by the wayside in the heart of that sad woman might grow and bring forth fruit abundantly to the glory of God. For the next two or three days she was much in our thoughts and prayers, and on the following Sunday morning the Biblewoman went off hopefully and trustfully to her house to bring her to church.

About an hour and a half passed, and I was wondering why they delayed so long, fearing we must begin without waiting any longer for them, when I heard a slow and heavy footstep mounting the steep stairs to the loft. It was the little Biblewoman coming back alone. She sat down heavily on a stool, saying, “She would not come; she has turned away from the Gospel; the devil is too strong.” This woman was only one of many such disappointments, but somehow we expected better things of her—she had seemed so eager, as if she really had accepted the good news.

We found that both she and her whole family were worshippers of a comparatively new cult, called “The Cult of the Great Brother,” the “Great Brother” being the “Great Ancestor of the Heavenly Spheres.” This “Ancestor” is supposed to be a spirit with miraculous gifts and powers of healing the sick, and of delivering opium victims from the craving for the drug. There is no idol, but a “worship table,” generally draped with red and gilt embroidery—an incense-burner in the centre, red candles lighted at the sides, and several cups of tea placed around. This tea is called “virtuous tea,” and is supposed to have been

blessed by the spirit, and to have healing virtue for all who partake and worship, no other medicine being used.

At the back of the table and in the place of honour facing the open heavens, there hangs a large scroll with "Atmospheric Heaven's Ancestor" inscribed in very large handsome Chinese characters. The worshippers spread a feast, and offer sacrifices; a beast of some kind is killed, and the blood sprinkled. The worship continues both day and night, for those who attend for healing. I knew one case where a very bad man, who belonged to this "cult," was badly hurt in a quarrel with another man, his life being despaired of. Sheep being scarce in this province, his friends had searched the countryside for a lamb to offer as a sacrifice to the "Great Brother." After some time one was procured and offered up, accompanied by an all-night session of worship and feasting. The man got better, and his health slowly returned to him, but he became blind. On my next visit there, the villagers told me that, though the "Great Brother" had been pleased to heal him, yet, because of his wickedness, he was rejected of "heaven" and consequently smitten with blindness.

Well, our "wayside" lady and her family were worshippers of this cult, and, alas! the downward pull was too strong, and her "beginning faith" too weak to withstand the threats of husband and friends, and all the opposition and pressure brought to bear upon her from all sides, and she remained a worshipper of the "Great Brother." How we prayed for her! How we stormed heaven on her behalf! How we explained, exhorted, warned, and tried to persuade her to turn from these false teachings and accept the

truth of God!—but with no effect. She seemed to harden more and more as the days went by, and at last told us not to come to her house, as she had determined to remain as she was.

Six years passed, and we saw and heard no more of her, until this year, when she suddenly turned up one summer morning at church, having been brought there by a Christian woman. As we recognised one another, she burst out in her peculiarly high, sharp voice, "If only I had listened to your words six years ago, I wouldn't be as I am to-day; my husband, son, and daughter-in-law are all dead and gone, and I only am left." She has now quite made up her mind to worship God, and has already destroyed all her idols and idol basket, and has entered a class for beginners, proving an eager, apt, and humble pupil, as hot-hearted and devoted in her worship of God as she used to be in the worship of idols.

Hail, rain, or shine, immediately after breakfast on Sunday mornings, she wends her way to church, and spends all her time both before and after the services in learning to read hymns, the Prayer Book, and Scripture.

One afternoon, on our way to a village, we came up behind three well-dressed women, of perhaps between fifty and sixty years of age, stumping along fairly quickly on their bound feet. A little boy was escorting them; he was carrying a pair of red lacquer baskets, filled with yellow paper, incense sticks, and tiny idol dolls. The woman with us greeted them with, "Where are you going so late in the day?" Without delaying an instant they called back, "To such-and-such a temple." Then our friend said, "Those women are

notable temple devotees ; they have accumulated many years of merit, have finished their own preparations for happiness in the next world, and now they are going to give three more days freely to idol rites and prayers for the benefit of the temple-keeper's family."

"Invite them to turn round and walk with us along the road to heaven," I said to one of my companions ; and immediately the invitation was given, "Sisters, you are going the wrong road ; the temple road will never lead you to heaven ; come with us and we will show you the road that leads to eternal peace and happiness." There was no reply, only the stump, stump along the road.

We meet so many who will not even stop a moment to listen to the gospel message, but who keep doggedly stumping along in the way of idolatry and sin, and give no heed to the invitation, "Come thou with us, and we will show you a better road."

Writing of temple devotees reminds me of a woman, the only Christian in a huge district of many villages and hamlets. She has a wonderful story to tell ; I wish you could have heard it from her own lips.

She was at one time very wicked—as low down as a woman could be, but it has been said, and truly, that "the Lord Jesus has raked the gutter for some of His saints."

About middle age this particular woman became an ardent temple devotee, hoping in this way to accumulate enough merit to cover and atone for the sins of her former life ; making pilgrimages from temple to temple to propitiate the idols. About eight years ago she was in a shop in a certain village, a good distance from her home, on one of these

pilgrimages, when a man came in to sell books. She had been watching him for some time as he went in and out amongst the crowds of people, talking to one and another, trying to sell his books, as it was market-day. He was having very little success in either tract-distributing or book-selling, the crowds being bent on marketing and business, and entirely indifferent to other things ; seeing this, she felt very sorry for him. Presently, when he came into the shop where she was, she asked him what books he was selling, and bought a couple, although she herself could not read. The colporteur told her they were "worshipping-God" books, and he spoke a few words in explanation. The woman took the books back with her on her return home, and asked some of her own village friends to read them and tell her something of the contents, but no one in the village understood enough of the written Chinese character either to read them properly or explain their meaning, so she placed them in one of the drawers of her own table, together with a pile of idol papers and pamphlets, and there they remained for some time.

One day she went to that table drawer for something, and noticed that though the idol books had become both mildewed and worm-eaten, the "worshipping-God books" were clean, untouched, and whole. She looked at them in astonishment, and then suddenly thought, "These books must be good books or they would be worm-eaten too." She took them out and placed them with her paper idol prayers, in the most sacred spot she knew of, at the very bottom of her precious red lacquer idol prayer-paper basket, and there they remained. She diligently read her daily idol prayers as usual, and in her zeal to accumulate

merit enough to ensure a happy after-life, walked all the way to Pine River City, about twenty-five or twenty-six miles distant, to invoke the good offices of a celebrated idol there.

One day, as she was sitting outside on the temple steps, diligently reading her prayers and worshipping heaven and earth, a Biblewoman came by. She stopped in front of our devotee and with her Bible tapped her sharply on the head to attract her attention, saying, "What are you doing here, old lady? Come with me, I will teach you to worship the true God!" She rose from her seat in astonishment, and meekly followed the Biblewoman down the street to her own room, where she was taught to pray to God, and told not to be afraid to give up idolatry and turn to God.

For some time she continued her idol prayers, but somehow the zest was gone. "They had no flavour for me," she said, and at last one day she, in her heart and mind, flung out a kind of challenge to God, saying she would be a Buddhist nun out and out, or else worship God. While in this state of indecision, her relatives at Pine River City sent a sedan-chair for her, with an invitation to come and visit them, and she recognised the Hand of God in providing a way for her to "learn of Him." She got into the chair and came to Pine River City, and after a few days' visit to her friends she came to our school. Although she was nearly sixty years of age at the time, she became a keen, apt pupil, and quickly learned the romanised system of reading; now she can both read and expound the New Testament and parts of the Old, quite well.

She had her own system of Bible-marking, with tiny strips of red paper placed here and there to dis-

tinguish her favourite parables and miracles. I have seen her sitting with heathen men and women around her listening in amazement as she read and explained passage after passage in the simplest, quaintest way. “It was when old Church-mother ‘Twice-born’ struck me on the head,” she said, with a twinkle in her black eyes, “that I became a believer. She struck me so hard that I *had* to listen to what she said.”

When I visited her village she took me to see the temple where she used to spend so much of her time ; it is a big, handsome building. As we entered the hall where the principal shrine was, she said aloud, as if addressing the idol, “God’s children have come,” and one felt that she, at least, believed in a personal devil, and that the idols were indeed “Satan’s seat.” As we stood in front of the shrine where the ugly, repulsive, tawdry gilt images were, she said solemnly, “When I believed in God and decided to worship Him, I one day brought my idol basket, idols, and paper prayers here to this shrine and said to this, my idol, ‘I am bringing back to you all that belongs to you, for now I have found my Lord! I don’t want you any more, I have found my own Lord.’” There were some other women devotees present, and she asked one of them to light an incense stick for her, “Because,” she said, “worshippers of God must not touch incense,” and with this light she set fire to all her idols, papers, and precious basket, in front of the shrine, and as they burned she sang, in her old cracked voice, one of the hymns she had learned at school, said a prayer, and then walked out of the temple, a new woman, to begin a new life as a child of God, with all her boats burned behind her.

She was baptized later, taking the name of “Twice-

born," the same name as that of the good Biblewoman who had "struck her on the head." Since that great day—the very greatest in her life—she has never given a backward glance to idolatry, and her faith—the faith that enabled her to reach up and place her feeble hand in the pierced hand of her Lord—has triumphed over many petty persecutions and trials during the years that have passed.

Many temptations have beset her, and there has been much sin to grieve over ; but yet we none of us doubt that old Church-mother "Twice-born" is a true and faithful witness for the Lord she loves.

We hoped that she would be able to come to Pine River City one year to spend the Christmas season with us, and the weather being wet we sent a sedan-chair to carry her down from her far-away mountain village. She was very pleased at being remembered, and sent for, and so happy to be with us all again. She insisted on bringing with her two large live fowls tied to the back of the sedan-chair, much to the disgust of the chair-bearers, who grumbled all the way about them, but, being an old woman, she had her way and arrived triumphantly. One of these fowls was a present for the pastor's family—the other for us. The latter she presented to us, saying, "It was reared specially for you. I cut a piece off its toe when it came out of the shell, as a mark, and it will be four pounds weight when it gets a meal!" Then she thanked us for sending the chair for her. "Truly, God's grace is exceedingly great," she said. "I had intended walking down to keep the birthday of my Lord, but the rain made it impossible. I was very sad and lonely ; then I prayed to my Heavenly Father, saying, 'I am your only daughter in this place, and I

have no one to celebrate my Lord's birthday with me. Are You going to leave me up here like a lonely orphan?' Immediately I heard voices outside the door; it was the chair come for me from Sungki! Truly God's grace is exceedingly great."

"Were you not often lonely in those first days of turning to God?" I asked her one day.

"Lonely!" she answered. "No; had I not God? And the birds sang to me in the early mornings, 'The doctrine is good, the doctrine is good!' I had God and the birds."

Shall we not thank God for this one woman alone, yet not lonely, because she had "God—and the birds"? There are many more like her, scattered up and down the thousands of villages, who are living isolated lives, far away from churches or church services, with no outside help whatever, but they have *God*, and with Him all the mighty power of heaven on their side. They have the birds too! "God—and the birds"!

CHAPTER IV

GRUMBLES

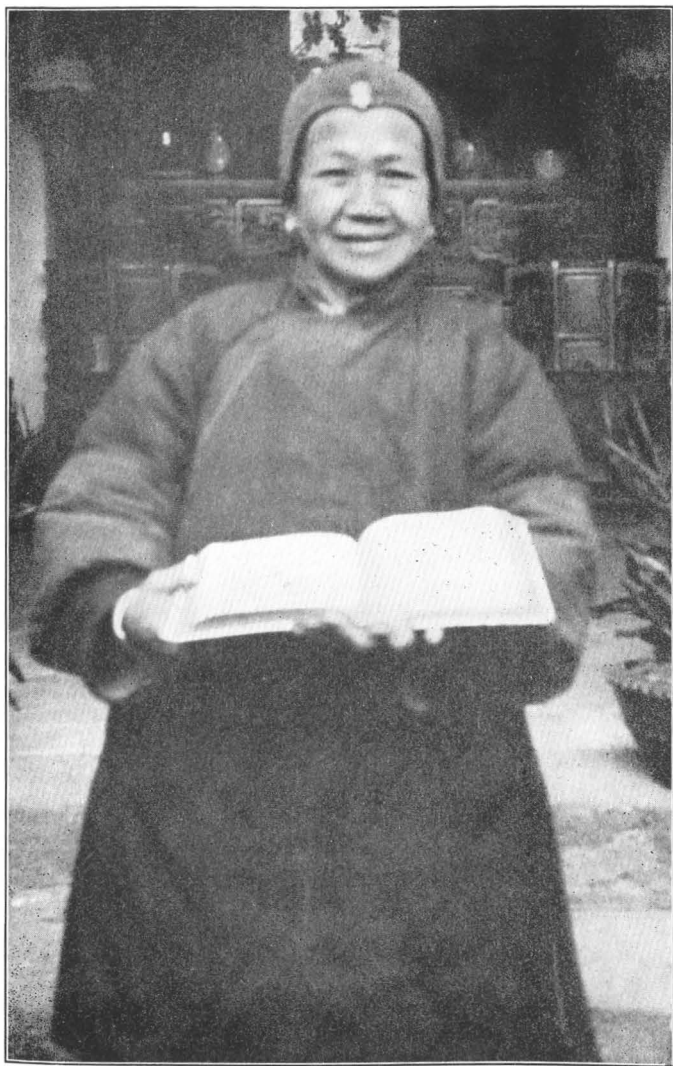
WHEN I was a child, I used to think it would be delightful to live in a caravan, like the gipsies—to travel about the country in a house on wheels, and stay anywhere one liked under God's blue heaven. The same idea has a certain fascination even now, and I sometimes think of the many people who cannot find houses to rent, or buy, that if they could only build for themselves nice wooden caravans, and, in them, "look at the world," as the Chinese say, how much happier and bigger life might be for them!

Just now my present dwelling-place reminds me in some ways of the caravan of my youthful dreams, though unfortunately the reality is not nearly so pleasantly fitted up as was the dream-caravan. It is a wooden loft with four walls of badly fitted wooden planks, with a door in the side looking out upon the roofs of the houses in the vicinity. I think it is that *door* that makes it feel like a caravan, for nothing else is really like it save the wooden walls.

Standing here at the open door, one can look beyond the houses, away to the mountains in the distance, and then up into the depths of God's beautiful blue, now of a "blueness" that can almost be felt. It seems to soak and absorb one into itself—almost to envelop one in its azure depths. There is not a single fleck of cloud in all its wide expanse.

The mountains look as if they have decked themselves for a festival just now : red, brown, and gold-coloured shrubs are dotted about ; great, shaggy, brick-colour wild lilies, which the Chinese call "Beggars' Heads," not scattered in units or single file, but massed together in close formation in certain places. Along the wayside the banks are covered with Michaelmas daisies, which have absorbed into themselves so much of the glorious blue above them that they have forgotten their original colour. But I miss the wild gentians here ; either they are over for the season, or else they do not like this rugged mountain district.

I had almost forgotten ; this is to be a chapter of grumbles ! Well, to begin with, we had a very disturbed night, partly due to the caravan-loft with its thin wooden walls, and the broken planks, which allowed too much of the noisy outside world to enter ; and then, though one seldom complains of too much moonlight, we certainly had more than enough last night. It was at the full, and shone straight in on us in all its silvery beauty. The midnight silence was broken, first of all by the cats, who seemed to be giving either the first or the last concert of the season, and were bent on advertising it well—while in the opposite house an angry infant demanded its meed of attention with such insistence, that at last its poor tired mother roused herself to supply the need. It takes some noise to arouse a sleeping Chinese. I was once told a story of a thief who broke into a house at night ; he softly approached the bed where a woman lay sleeping, and gently took an ear-ring out of the ear uppermost ; then turned her head round, and took the one from the other side, without disturbing her.



CHURCH-MOTHER TWICE-BORN

Facing page 32.]

Also another, of a young girl, whose bed-covering was taken off her by a thief, while she slept peacefully on, oblivious of the fact that it was winter-time !

But to get back to our own night of troubles—the goose also must needs disturb us ! This goose deserves some special notice ; she is seven years old, and judging by the respect and attention paid her, must have laid a golden egg at some stage in her career. Every evening, after a plentiful supper, she is carefully put to bed in a box, nicely lined with straw, in the warm kitchen ; she is most intelligent, and acts as watch-dog, raising her goose voice in loud and continued protest at any unusual sound. Last night the sounds were many and varied : loud talking ; footsteps passing to and fro. In a village three miles off, a dark deed of murder had been committed, and some of the sounds that disturbed the silence were from those who were implicated in the wicked deed and were fleeing from the soldiers.

The freshness and quiet of the early morning hours were spoiled by the loud voices of a man and woman quarrelling ; the woman's shrill, sharp voice being raised in cursing and threatening language. Her trouble seemed to centre round the fowl-house, for, listening carefully, one heard the words, " My hens have been poisoned ! " Her hens had apparently strayed into the man's field, where arsenic had been strewn to kill the worms, and they had eaten the poison.

Then there are " family grumbles " always with us, for we are living in a house where there is only one Christian man, who is so deaf that to teach him anything fresh is impossible ; the only response one gets is that he places his hand to his heart, and says most

fervently, "I truly believe, I truly believe." The family quarrels are most trying, and every sound reaches our loft. They centre round a miserable little daughter-in-law, an underfed, undersized, and over-worked girl of seventeen years of age, who came as a bride last year to the home. The wedding had been arranged in the ordinary way by a hired match-maker, and neither the bridegroom nor any member of his family had seen her until she arrived at the house, when, to their dismay, they found the girl a delicate epileptic.

There was no redress, for the purchase money had been paid, and her own family were only too glad to get rid of her ; so here she is, a poor, little, unwanted, badly treated bit of humanity. The bridegroom, who is a grandson of my Christian host, refuses to accept or recognise her as his wife, and demands that another one shall be bought for him ! The matter is being hotly disputed on both sides all day long and sometimes far into the night.

About midnight a very real disturbance took place. A neighbour's house door was assailed with knocks and bangs, and loud voices raised in argument, for quite a long time. At last the sounds died down, and to-day we hear that our neighbour's son, who spends his time and money in gambling and riotous living, instead of working steadily in his father's fields, came home at midnight, when his father refused to open the door, or allow him inside ; at last the door was opened, and the father told him he should eat *his* rice no more without working for it. After many angry words, the son went to his own room, quietly taking with him a length of rope, and later was found trying to hang himself from the roof. His father and mother broke

open the door, and rescued him. The son's reason for attempting suicide was to avenge himself on his father for all his fancied wrongs.

It is now getting on for supper-time, and in every house the kitchen fires are being lighted. From the door of my caravan-loft I can see a dark purple misty pall hanging over the village. It is the smoke from every house trying to find an outlet, either through the roofs, chimneys, or any more convenient hole. My eyes are smarting! Everybody's smoke seems to be wending its way to *my* loft—as well as that from our own fires! It is a busy moment, and I hear the round iron rice-pots being washed and scraped. Every house-mother does exactly the same thing, placing a large wooden tub of cold boiled rice into the wide open pot, which has been half filled with water. The rice will slowly, slowly get hot through. Then every one will cook, most probably, the very same kind of vegetables, in the very same way, adding a little lard to each bowl; and presently each table will have its hot, steaming bowls of beautifully cooked rice, and in the centre of each table, within convenient reach of all, three or four bowls of vegetables and pickles, to be daintily picked up by each person's chopsticks and eaten with the rice.

It is rather interesting to watch how deftly they hold and use these bits of bamboo stick; they are really dainty in use, and ever so much nicer than our elaborate and civilised sharp knives and forks! Even little children of four or five years of age learn to handle their chopsticks almost as deftly as their elders,

Visitors are treated with great ceremony and cordiality, though the table conversation is very

simple—no sparkling oratory or witty stories; just a solemn dedication of themselves to the business in hand. The guest is treated to the best in the house and with abounding hospitality, and if you are a foreigner you will eat of everything offered or *die*, rather than hurt their feelings! Table manners are not *very* pretty, but one gets used to them!

The Biblewoman and myself are not eating with the family, preferring our own quiet little table, and my supper to-night will be a steaming bowl of white rice, boiled in water, which, when soft and luscious, has a large spoonful of nice condensed milk "out of a clean tin" stirred into it, making a supper fit for a king or even for a queen!

In the next village, a tiny hamlet with only twenty or thirty families, our abode is also a loft, a much lower one—indeed, so low that it feels sometimes as if the roof were resting on one's brain. It is filled up, as usual, with all the household rubbish; an attempt at clearing is being made, but real cleaning up would be an unheard-of and hopeless task. A corner is cleared, and two pairs of stools, with planks placed lengthwise, set up for beds. We can touch the roof quite easily at one side; the loft is built of mud, and the walls are crumbling away in parts, with many holes, allowing the soft moonlight to flood the place and make weird shadows, not only in the corners but in the whole loft, which seems full of strange and startling shapes.

The moonlight plays tricks even with my very own familiar travelling baskets, containing all my itinerating equipment. Living in heathen houses and sleeping in doorless lofts, the nights and days filled with strange sights and stranger sounds, is it any wonder that the

words of the Psalmist, " My soul is among lions," find an echo within one's heart ?

We read of the Lord Jesus rising up a great while before day, and going out into the silence of the desert, or climbing the mountains for a quiet time with the Father, and one can in some small measure understand this desire for aloneness with God as one itinerates amongst the mountains and in the plains of this great land, sharing the lives, and living in the midst of the sorrows and wickednesses of these needy folk. It is so difficult to be alone anywhere, when living in the villages. There is a quiet path between the paddy-fields at the back of this house, leading to a steep mountain opposite. It is nice after supper, between the lights, to take a stroll there, and think, and pray, and plan, but one so seldom can be really alone ; there is always somebody coming behind—a stealthy foot-step, a little apologetic cough ; and you turn round to find that you are being followed by some one.

In preaching in the houses, too, there is always that " some one " who tries to get behind your back ; it is one of the trials in house-visiting—the women always wanting to get behind, instead of sitting in front and listening. The law of gravitation seems to work in two ways : there is the constant, insistent, downward pull, but there is always present in a group of women a backward pull, away from the light ; back behind doors, tables, and chairs, into the dark and shadowy corners of the guest-hall, anywhere away from the " Blessed light " of the gospel message.

And there are one or two other trying things in village visiting, which must be recorded in this chapter of grumbles.

There is the baby trouble—those babies that I

referred to in my first chapter! They swarm everywhere! From six months old to three years, they seem to be enjoying their very wickedest years!

You have several mothers and grandmothers sitting and standing round, with babies of various ages in their arms and on their laps. They all want to listen to what the strange visitors have to say, but can they? At first the babies are so bright, laughing and enjoying themselves, with their little round faces and beady black eyes, looking like Chinese cherubs come down to earth on a visit from the blue; but presently, when they find their elders are taking more notice of the visitors than of themselves (such a state of things having been hitherto unknown to them), they begin to wriggle and whimper, and whimper and wriggle, getting more and more insistent until listening to the "good news" becomes an impossibility, and one by one mothers, grandmothers, and babies, they all vanish, and you begin to wonder whether those innocent-looking cherubs really *have* come from the blue after all!

Then there are the interruptions from animals, as they stroll in and out at their leisure. Pigs, fowls, ducks, geese, dogs—all or some, in every house, and each, in turn, raising a protest against any limitation of their liberty!

On one occasion, when we were seated and the ordinary courtesies had been exchanged, we began to preach (I do not like the word "preach," but I know of no other English word which really quite explains our work. It is not "teaching" exactly, it is not "exhorting" exactly, it is not "persuading" exactly, and certainly it is not "preaching" exactly, but a happy combination of all four).

Well, on this particular occasion, as we preached, a bold rooster separated himself from the rest of his family, shook out his feathers, stood in front of us, raised his head, looked straight in our faces, and crowed for his life! He was promptly shoo'ed away, but again and again returned to the attack, and though we tried to keep the floor, yet after a short time, finding the noises of the "rooster" and his family drowning every attempt we made to speak, we retired from the field, feeling very indignant and humiliated indeed!

CHAPTER V

DEEPER DOWN—FARTHER OUT

SOMETIMES, in the golden twilight, when work is over for the day, I like to stroll along the river-bank at Ching-ho and to "eat the clean air," as the Chinese so quaintly express it. One or two bamboo rafts are being punted up and down a path of shimmering gold, the tall, steep mountain on the opposite side; its brow fringed with a thin, straight line of sentinel pine trees, has mirrored itself clearly in the deeper places of the still waters, while the fussy, money-loving, grubby little town at its base has quieted itself for the evening meal. This is the hour when men who have been at their work all day go a-fishing with small hand-nets. They cast the nets into the river, then walk along beside the bank, holding the rods, and sweeping the river with their nets. I never saw them catch any large fish by this method, often a few tiny ones being the only result. Others, more adventurous in spirit, boarded bamboo rafts, and rowed out into the middle of the river, to bring back their nets filled with both big and little fish.

We, too, in our fishing for souls, try to launch out into deeper waters, and farther away from the shore, year by year; so that, by degrees, the whole district may have the privilege of hearing and responding to the Blessed Gospel of the Grace of God.

I am writing this at perhaps, in one direction, the

very edge of our district ; and certainly we are fishing in the very deepest water here.

This is a small wayside inn and I am sitting in the only spot where there is light enough to write—that is, in front of the kitchen fireplace, for there is no guest-hall for the visitors. Three feet away on my right is the kitchen table (indeed, it is the only decent table in the place), and there are eight people, including the innkeeper's wife, seated around it—gambling.

It is interesting to watch their faces, the eager, intense expression of greedy concentration on what they are doing, with never a glance up, never a look round. In front, within a foot of me, the family pig is fast asleep, peacefully dreaming, and emitting contented little grunts at intervals ; while the hens and dogs are everywhere.

The innkeeper's young daughter is busy making preparations for cooking our supper ; she is putting more wood on the fire, and the cheerful sparks are getting on to my dress and writing materials, and the less cheerful smoke into my eyes. There is no chimney, but the loft where we sleep seems to be the receptacle for the smoke ; it finds its way up there quite easily, but never seems to find a way out. My surroundings by day are unspeakably piggy, and the nights are hideous, though I feel nice and "apart from the world" when I get under my mosquito net ! The two Biblewomen and I sleep in the loft ; the boards of the floor are thin and broken in places, and there is a real danger of falling through on to the people sleeping down below. The roof, walls, and flooring are one uniform, dull mole colour, not the work of the painter's brush, but merely the result of the dust of

ages! There are no windows; there is a doorway, but no door, and it is always twilight up there.

It is the first time that women workers have come here to stay for a few days to teach. Some of the people have already heard a little of the gospel from those who have slept at the inn when travelling up and down to the city of Kien-ning. A colporteur has stayed a night or two occasionally and has sold and given away tracts and gospels, but we are the first to really *stay* and evangelise here and in the villages around.

We walked, to-day, down the only street of the village. There are a few small shops and three or four inns. In the doorway of each inn there was a table filled with men, gambling, while there were travellers and loafers of every description looking on.

“Mr. Blear-eye” is a farmer by profession, but, I am afraid, a loafer in practice. His house and farm are a short distance from the village but he seems to spend all his time going backwards and forwards. He stands by the gambling-tables, watching them, though he does not play; then he saunters from shop to shop gossiping, and so his days are passed. He is a tall, blear-eyed old man, unwashed and slovenly, long-skirted, with heels slipping down at every step; an unsavoury-looking individual, yet, deep down in his heart, there seems some desire for a more useful life; he was interested enough in the colporteur’s preaching to buy gospels and tracts, and when we are preaching to the women, he always comes and stands by, sometimes asking a question relative to the subject he has heard.

“Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we can find no rest until we find it in Thee.” Mr. Blear-eye seems to

be in search of rest, but he is still undecided as to where alone true rest is to be found.

Mr. Blear-eye's daughter-in-law is a widow, about forty-five years of age ; we visited her in their home, and she told us something of her life-story. Years of stern battling with poverty, sickness in the home, and difficult circumstances have left their marks, and looking at the hard lines of her face, one felt that true, warm love had very little place in her life.

Women who are accustomed to poverty, daily drudgery, and constant family worries and disappointments do not soften and mellow in character as the years go by ; more often they harden, as fire hardens clay ; yet, her emotions were distinctly stirred when she heard, for the first time, of the Saviour's love and sacrifice on her behalf. That story of love, " old, yet ever new," seems more and more beautiful when told in dark, unhomelike surroundings, and to unhappy, miserable women. She has already had a few days' teaching, and one hopes much that before long she may be free to come to school for further teaching, and that the joy of salvation may change and fill her heart and life.

Another woman, perhaps forty years of age, but looking much older, is a picture of sadly wrecked womanhood. Her gaunt, yellow face, large distended eyes, and discoloured fingers, all point to opium-smoking. When questioned on the subject, she confessed, readily enough, but with the excuse that she began using the drug as a medicine when she was very ill. She is also a gambler, and has, at least, two husbands.

She is coming again and again to hear the gospel-teaching these days, and one wonders what is attract-

ing her to the message of love, purity, and light. Is it "deep calling unto deep"? The depth of her need and sin, calling unto the deeps of God's mercy and grace? We know not how to help her, as yet, because nothing *can* be done until she gives up smoking opium; she has already given it up several times, but the craving has drawn her back again. She told me yesterday that she had made some fresh tea, the evening before; poured out a bowl of it, and presented it to God, praying Him to accept all He wished, and to use the rest to heal her of the craving for opium; then she drank the bowl of tea. It was her way of seeking help; a heathen way certainly, but she knows no better. She draws largely upon the sympathy and prayers of us all. Her conscience is unawakened, her will-power sapped by constant indulgence in opium, and she is only conscious, as yet, of the misery and wretchedness of her condition.

She is one of the many whose lives we touch and seek to influence—women who have never had a chance, tossed about by hard circumstances, with never a hand held out in pity; they are adrift, without a rudder, on the bleak, black ocean of heathenism and sin. What a contrast to the wonderful life of gladness, contentment, and beauty which might be theirs if only they would be willing to break through the fetters that bind them and come to the Lord Jesus.

A young woman who has been wonderfully, beautifully saved out of the deepest water, and is now a true child of God, working for Him, exclaimed one day, "Before I heard this doctrine, no one ever told me to be good; my own mother-in-law *taught me to be wicked*"; but then *her* will-power had not been weakened by opium, like this poor woman's here.

Every night, after returning to the loft, we hear the loud voices of the men and women at the gambling-tables. One night I heard a woman's voice telling the men the gospel story which she had heard from us during the day.

Just before daylight this morning rapid footsteps were heard passing up the street, and there was much loud talking. Later we were told that it was the family of a highway robber, fleeing to a hiding-place from the soldiers.

It appears that a respectable cloth merchant, who had been away in the country, was returning home with a large amount of money. Suddenly a brigand rushed upon him, and being at a lonely part of the road, with no help at hand, overpowered and knocked him down with a stick. He became unconscious, was then robbed of all he possessed, and left there. Some good Samaritan passing by saw the man, and gave the alarm at the next village. Afterwards the soldiers were sent out to make arrests; the brigand escaped, but the soldiers must not return empty-handed, so they arrested the headmen of the village near the scene of the robbery, where the brigand was supposed to live; they also destroyed the brigand's house, and seized all the live stock, and his wife and family fled.

We were glad to get away from the gossip and news of the inn this morning, and from the constant sight of those dreadful gambling-tables, and visit a village in the neighbourhood. The tales one hears at a way-side inn are seldom pleasant; they are gruesome accounts of happenings on the highways of the land, graphically told by the travellers who pass from place to place, and losing none of their gruesomeness in the telling.

The Chinese word for "news" is rather picturesque; it means "the voice of the wind!" There is another rather picturesque expression we sometimes hear when we visit Chinese friends; it is the greeting—"Please come in; the wind is very great to-day!" It is a pretty phrase, conveying their pleasure and welcome. One has often asked, in reply, "Which wind?"

"The south wind, of course!"—meaning, "You are as welcome as the soft, warm south wind!"

We had to cross the river in a ferry-boat to get to our village, then again across a smaller river on a bamboo raft. A pleasant walk through a plantation of sugar-canes first, the tall plants and cool broad leaves affording us perfect shade; then straight through another plantation of sweet corn, sweet potatoes, and cotton, all growing in the same rich soil. The cotton plants were lovely, fruit and flowers blooming together—the pink, cream, and snow-white blossoms, with the bursting pods of white fluff, made a charming picture.

It was the first visit of messengers of the gospel to this village. A crowd quickly gathered, out of curiosity, to see and hear; they were too frightened to be anything else but polite, and we were allowed to direct their thoughts upwards and heavenwards. Eternity alone will show with what results.

Sunday was a perfect day, and we forgot the inn and the gambling-tables for the time being!

The postmaster, who is kind and friendly, opened up the empty salt *yamen*, which is situated exactly opposite the inn, and allowed us to hold the Sunday services in the guest-hall there, quite a number of people attending both morning and afternoon.

The three Biblewomen gave addresses at the after-

noon service, and we had plenty of singing in between, which the Chinese love! Listening and watching for results, one's heart was just full of praise for these three women, each one, in herself, a marvel of God's grace. All three had been fished out of deep water themselves, and now, in their turn, were letting down their nets into deeper depths, in earnest desire for the salvation of others. When the long service was finished, one of them stood up again, and said, "The sun has not yet sunk behind the hills; I have a lot more to say, please remain sitting!" She then gave them another address, and when she had finished, one of the other two gave an even longer one! Then the third spoke a few words more, and so the service continued until the dusk actually fell, and our audience melted away to cook the family suppers—then, at last, we remembered the inn!

We are staying in such a nice house now, with a well-to-do Christian widow. It is a large, well-built old house, clean and airy; my room, for a wonder, is a real room, downstairs, with a slate-tiled floor, no windows or glass, but instead, pretty, open, fret-work doors, looking on to the weather-well, so that fresh air and sunshine can come through. There is a good bit of valuable old carving over the doorways, and in the guest-hall each large carved plaque represents a story of ancient Chinese mythology, outlined with red and gold lacquer paint; the colours are dimmed with age, but the carving is still perfect.

My hostess is sweet and bright enough now, but she had a terribly sad and troubled married life before she became a Christian. She was married when quite

young into a family where there were two sons, daughters, and father-in-law and mother-in-law.

Her mother-in-law was bad-tempered, severe, and tyrannical. Her husband was the second son, gentle in disposition, good-tempered, but an inveterate gambler. His parents tried every means, harsh and otherwise, to stop him gambling and keep him at home ; he was in danger of ruining the home and of gambling away all their property. They locked him in his room again and again, but when set free he was always to be found at the gambling-tables. On one occasion his parents flogged him, then locked him up in a dark rice granary for twenty days, alone ; when he regained his liberty, he again spent all his time in the same way. Once more they locked him up in the same place, and supplied him with food three times a day. One morning, when his breakfast was taken to him, they found him dead ; he had hanged himself during the night.

It is whispered abroad amongst friends and relatives that his own mother, in her anger, provided him with a rope and told him to hang himself. Shortly afterwards the boy's father died suddenly, broken-hearted with sorrow and trouble. After some time mother-in-law and daughter-in-law separated, and now live in different houses.

As we were passing by a certain house one day, on the way to a village, one of the women who accompanied us whispered softly, “ There is a young woman in there who has given birth to a baby girl, but has refused to rear the infant, and has thrown her out on the rubbish heap to die ; the infant cried for two days, then died of cold and exposure.”

The next day we visited that house. The family,



including the young woman, were at dinner; she looked miserably ill and weak. They invited us into the guest-hall, and presently the women were at leisure to come and sit with us, and listen to the gospel.

I whispered to the Biblewoman, "Read and explain the Ten Commandments, placing special emphasis on the sixth." She did this clearly and tactfully, showing that infanticide was also a breach of that commandment; although she did not actually say, "Thou art the man," yet all the women present knew to what she referred. Those who know not natural love, whose hearts and minds are ignorant and callous through grinding poverty and continual contact with a hard world of cruelty and heathenism, have the greatest need of the message of God's Love, which alone can melt and soften stony hearts and change them into hearts of flesh; therefore she too, before we left, heard of the Saviour who reached so far down, to save and uplift us all.

Undoubtedly, in most cases, infanticide is the outcome of poverty, but there are cases where parents refuse to rear their baby girls simply because they despise them, and desire only boys.

In Pine River City there is a well-to-do woman. A baby girl was born to her. She refused to rear the infant, and instead threw her out into the garden to die. A kindly neighbour near by, hearing the wails of the poor little unwanted bit of humanity, rescued her, intending to rear her to be her own son's wife. The child had a happy home for six years; at the end of that time the boy, who was to be her future husband, became suddenly very, very ill, and his mother was so distressed at the thought of losing him, that she

called in a fortune-teller and had his fortune told. The fortune-teller said the boy's life was being overshadowed by his little “fiancée”; that she had an unlucky influence over him, and that as long as she remained in the house the boy's life was in danger. His mother at once decided to take the girl back, and hand her over to her own mother, who was very angry, and most unwillingly received the child. From that time she was constantly ill-treated and badly nourished; she became miserably thin, weak, and ill. One day, in a burst of anger, her mother caught her up and threw her into a large tub filled with wood-ashes, and the helpless little one was smothered to death.

Just a year later, during a time of great rain, the drains that run down each side of the street were overflowing with a rushing flood of water; this woman's little three-year-old son was playing about in front of his own door, when he suddenly slipped on the greasy pavement and fell into the drain. No one was present at the time of the accident, except a couple of smaller children; there was no one there to rescue him, so he was carried swiftly away by the rushing flood, and the little dead body was found afterwards close to the gates of the city.

I only record the outlines of these stories, but even the outlines will show something of what “launching out into the deep” and “letting down our nets for a draught” may mean in a heathen land.

CHAPTER VI.

MEDIUMS

WE are living in the strangest mixture of heathenism and Christianity!

My hostess is the dearest old lady, a splendid type of a Chinese mother-in-law, with a strong face and a strong will, ruling her large household well and kindly. She has four sons, their wives, grandchildren, and many other relations all living under the same roof.

We arrived yesterday to stay a week in the loft of this busy, noisy house. Our welcome was rather doubtful and strained, and we wondered why, until the old lady, freed from her household duties, sat beside us in the loft and related all her troubles. She was much broken down and wept again and again, as she told us that for some time past the family had not been free from illness, four out of every five having been laid up with malaria at one time, while even still, several of them were weak and ailing.

The youngest daughter-in-law was daily expected home to die of consumption, and she herself was only now recovering from a long and severe illness; altogether she was feeling weak, sad, and disheartened. The young consumptive daughter-in-law had gone to her own village home for a change, but was no better; and they feared she would die there. The Chinese never allow any one to die away from their home if they can possibly help it, so, seriously ill as she was, a

sedan-chair had to be sent to bring her back. All the family are heathen, except for two of the sons; one of these is a baptized Christian, the other only a beginner, and the former is the husband of the sick girl.

For him the trouble is very deep, because the rest of the family are trying to persuade him to get idol rites performed for the recovery of his wife's health, or for the bettering of her condition in the next life. He told me that his wife's friends only want him to spend money, though they know he is a poor man, and that his wife, humanly speaking, cannot be healed. He has refused to invoke such aid or to spend money on any idol rites, and now they are blaming him for her illness.

We made inquiries about the old lady's own illness. She is a most earnest temple devotee. Every summer she joins a band of others like herself, for the purpose of making pilgrimages to all the celebrated idol temples in the district. She has even climbed a steep mountain called "Dang-Lu," sixteen or seventeen miles from her home and three thousand feet high. On the very highest summit a temple is built, in which there is a celebrated idol; here the devotees congregate every summer for a "big worship," and no temple devotee is considered to have completed her "accumulation of merit" until she has been at least once in her lifetime to worship on "Dang-Lu."

This year my hostess made the pilgrimage, and to another celebrated temple as well, called the "Hen Mountain Temple." The "Hen Mountain" is peculiarly shaped, with some resemblance to a hen sitting with wings outstretched, guarding her chicks. While there she became ill very suddenly, and had to return home. The heathen were much exercised in

their minds as to why she should have become ill while actually worshipping the idols. Had she offended the spirit of the idol? They consulted a spiritist medium, and a séance was held. The medium said the idol in the "Hen Mountain" was a very malevolent spirit and easily offended; he had stolen away one of the woman's three souls—hence her illness. The remedy suggested by the medium was that three grown men should be sent to the temple to take an offering to the spirit there, and humbly request that the woman's soul be given back again to her body. This was done, and she is now slowly recovering her strength; but we think and hope that the power of idolatry is partly broken, and that her belief in the idols, or rather her devotion to them, is at least staggered by this experience, for, until now, idolatry has held full sway over her mind, heart, and life.

We tried hard to teach her the futility of idol worship, and, as we talked together, felt that the thick crust of heathenism with which she is encased had begun to crack, and that a ray of the blessed light had penetrated; but she needs our earnest prayers, for such a victory over the enemy as this woman's salvation and freedom in Christ Jesus will not be easily won.

To-day the poor consumptive girl was brought home, and we are earnestly praying for opportunities of speaking to her of her soul's deep need of salvation. After supper, a prayer-meeting was held in a Christian house near by, to which the girl's husband came, and he joined us in earnest prayer for his wife. Afterwards, as we all walked back together, he said, "Sister, we are just full of trouble." He sat down at the kitchen table, with his head resting on his hands, in a very abandonment of sorrow and anxiety, until his elder

brother came in and with a touch of real brotherly sympathy took his arm, and coaxed him away to rest with him.

One of the Christians told me of the difference Christianity has made in the life of this younger man—a difference that all his family have noticed and appreciated. He is steadier—no more going out at night to other houses for pleasure; he is more industrious—working in his fields from early dawn to dusk; he is more patient with his wife, who has the name of being a hard, shrewish, bad-tempered girl; and his mother told me that he is more filial to her, never answering her back crossly since he became a Christian.

The sick woman was up and sitting for a while in the sunshine outside her front door the next day; so we sat beside her and tried to draw her thoughts away from her bodily illness and fix them on her soul's greater need. She nodded acquiescence from time to time, but there was no other response, and one wonders if her heart is in any degree prepared to accept salvation, even at this late hour. Her friends asked me for medicine for her, which was gladly given. It may perhaps pave the way for further friendliness and opportunities of talking to her. She listened quietly to-day, while we prayed for her, but as she made no remark, one cannot tell whether the fallow ground is breaking up or not.

The sick girl's mother has been to consult a spiritist medium, who told her that a demon was troubling her daughter, and was the cause of her illness, and that therefore idol prayer-papers, a paper model of a sedan-chair, and a paper model of a river-boat must be procured, a good feast prepared, and a Taoist priest invited to come and cast the demon out. "Invite

the demon," said the medium, "to eat a good meal first, then to please sit, either in the sedan-chair or in the boat, and so depart elsewhere"—all of which has been done, but the girl is no better or happier.

These paper models are largely used in idolatry; they are beautifully made and are perfect in every detail. I lately examined a paper model dwelling-house; it was quite six feet long, with height and width in proportion. Every detail of a dwelling-house was there, even to the paper kitchen, stove, pots and pans; a sedan-chair stood in front of the house, with its paper chair-bearers, and inside the door paper slaves were in attendance. There was a beautifully furnished bride's room, with all the proper bride's furniture made of red paper, and—stranger than all—there was a cloth-shop with counter and paper fittings, fully stocked with paper cloth for sale, at the back door!

The framework of the model was made of strips of thinnest, lightest bamboo-wood, and rushes from the river's bank, covered with coloured paper, exquisitely finished. It was being made for the relatives of a rich family of the merchant class, who had lately died; there was to be an idol ceremony, the paper house burned by the idol priest, the ashes scattered, and the dead man was then supposed to have a beautiful house secured for his habitation in the next world, with all his needs supplied.

Buddhism, Taoism, and Spiritism are linked to one another so closely here that it is difficult to disentangle them, or differentiate between them in their working out, but all three combine to keep the people in darkness, and in abject slavery all their lives to the fear of offending wicked idols and demon spirits.

Next door to us there is a rich house where we have visited and sown the seed again and again, but always the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the appalling wickedness of heathenism have prevented growth, and what ought to be the garden of the Lord is still a desert, without a single oasis. Each visit seemed to furnish a fresh excuse for delay, but this time hideous sin—yea, the serpent himself—has made his way into the "garden," and one of his victims is the young daughter of the house. She had been betrothed for some time to a boy who is connected with Christians, and all went well until this year, when she suddenly became ill with some mysterious disease. The neighbours tell us that local herb doctors have been consulted, much medicine eaten, and money freely spent on her, but, alas! with no good result, for she is rapidly getting worse.

Then it was whispered that she was being tormented by the fox-demon, and it was said that bits of his fur had been found on her body and clothes. We visited the house and tried to see the girl, hoping to have a talk with her, but her father would not allow us to go near her. A man spiritist medium had been a constant visitor at the house for some time, and now his services have been requisitioned for the healing and casting out of the demon. This man is known to be both unscrupulous and wicked, but his evil influence over both mother and daughter is very strong, and he now lives there altogether, ostensibly to keep the demon subdued, but the poor young girl is no better, either in mind or body.

Oh, I am glad that our God is the Creator! He can *create* a sense of sin where no such sense exists;

He can dispel darkness and create Light, and Life, in those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

Such cases are not isolated, for in another village in which we stayed there was a young woman who had been very ill for some time. They had had doctors galore to see her, and she, too, had eaten much medicine, but was no better; indeed, they feared she was steadily getting worse. Our hostess whispered to me that "she was being troubled by a demon," but instead of actually using the word demon, she made a mysterious sign with her hand to make me understand her meaning.

As a last resort, the sick woman's family invited a Taoist priest to exorcise the demon, and as the ceremony took place in the open I could see it all.

The priest was dressed in a most picturesque gown of flowing, plum-coloured silk, with a large square of vivid rose-colour forming a breastplate in front, and the same at the back. He had on a turban of the same vivid colour with a drapery attached to the back, reaching to the shoulders, giving an Egyptian effect; he had a strong brown face, and seemed in downright earnest as he performed the ceremony.

They had erected a scaffold in front of the house, high enough for him to stand on and reach the sloping part of the roof, on which he placed a small tub of cooked rice, and in this stuck lighted incense sticks; he placed six bowls in front, three of which contained wine and three tea. There were two other bowls as well containing water, with which he sprinkled the roof of the house where the sick woman lay; then he sprinkled himself and the air around, after which he commenced his incantations—at first in a low, monotonous voice, but rising higher and higher into a shrill,

anxious tone. The chanting always ended in the words, "Come home, come home." The priest was calling the soul of the woman back to her body again. This was accompanied by genuflexions and mesmeric passes, made with his long, slender, nervy hands over his own head and body, again and again.

There were several women devotees standing in front of the house, chanting and helping him by burning idol prayers and papers. At the end of the ceremony, while the priest stepped down from the scaffold, the women devotees held the sick woman's clothes in a waiting attitude, and all together chanted until the last refrain, "Come home, come home," was finished, when they bundled the garments up, and rushed quickly into the sick woman's room with them.

The soul was supposed to have "come home" to her garments and from thence to the poor tortured body, and the demon cast out—so the ceremony ended. Next morning we heard that the sick woman had been carried by her husband on his back, at midnight, to the house of a friend, so that the demon might not find her again! Later we heard she was much worse. Since then, each morning at daybreak, her mother opens the house door and in that same shrill, high, anxious tone calls out, "My daughter, come home, come home." But there is no answer save an empty echo across the valley from the mountains opposite.

It was not until long afterwards that we heard the sequel to this story. It was in the afternoon class for Christians, and we were studying the Book of the Acts. Chapter xix., containing the story of the defeat of the vagabond Jewish exorcists, was being taught, when a woman from "Mountain Pit" village said,

“Something exactly like that happened in my village lately,” and went on to tell how the poor, deceived, tormented girl wasted away, and died shortly after we left her village. It was thought at the time that the evil spirit had entered into the man who claimed the power of exorcism. He became unsettled in mind and action, and spent all his time in gambling. One day, in a fit of frenzy at his losses, he publicly tore all his clothes off and fled naked from the village.

The sister of the young girl who died suddenly became ill with the same mysterious symptoms. Herb medicines were given to her, and many idolatrous rites performed on her behalf, but without result. One day, in sheer desperation, as a last resource only, she visited this Christian woman’s house and humbly asked for prayer and help. “We knelt together,” said this child of God, “and I placed my two hands on her head, as I had seen a Biblewoman do, and I prayed earnestly to the Lord to cast the evil demon out, and heal and bless her. While I prayed she became calmer, and she left my house presently, healed.” The story was quietly and humbly told, but as she spoke there was a glow reflected on the plain, work-lined face, which brought to one’s mind the words, “Christ in me; the hope of glory.”

Are you not glad that the Lord Jesus took that long journey straight from the heart of God, and along the thorny paths of this world, through Calvary and the grave, to call straying souls home to God? May we, too, place our feet in the footprints of the Great Pathfinder, and stretch out a helping hand to many a one who has never heard of the way home?

I have occasionally stood and watched spiritist séances being held; the medium—who is almost

always a woman—sits in front of a table, swaying her body to and fro, with slow mesmeric movements. There is generally a looking-glass, either on the table, or underneath, into which she gazes. Cups of wine and tea are placed on the table for the refreshment of the spirit invoked ; she then burns paper prayers and mutters incantations, until her familiar spirit from the nether-world comes and takes control of her body. She apparently loses consciousness ; her face changes and becomes a deathly hue ; she seems to be in a kind of trance, though able to hear and answer the questions asked by the bystanders. At this point, those who have come to consult her light candles and keep the prayer papers burning, while incense sticks are also lighted.

I asked why lights were kept burning although it was day, and the guest-hall quite light ; the reply was : “ The medium goes down below, and as it is always dark down there she cannot see her way without a light.”

While she is in this trance-like state, those who wish to consult her come forward and ask questions—perhaps it is with regard to the reason of an illness. Has the sick person offended an idol ? Is a demon troubling ? What is the remedy in each case ? Sometimes she is asked where dead relatives are ? What is their condition in the other life ? Are they happy ? The medium answers all questions, her words are implicitly believed and her commands unquestioningly obeyed. The power for evil is very great, making and keeping the people miserably sad by what they hear of the whereabouts and condition of their dead.

Hard-earned money is freely spent on empty idol rites and ceremonies at the command of the medium, both for the supposed amelioration of the hard lot of

those who are gone before as well as for the casting out of demons from the living.

There is a woman at Ching-ho City for whose salvation we have prayed and worked for years. She is still outside the Kingdom of God, and all our persuasions, up to now, have found no lodging in her heart. When past middle age, her mother heard the gospel, and immediately made up her mind to be a Christian. For many years, and until her death, she served and witnessed faithfully for the Lord Jesus. She visited her daughter in Ching-ho many times, and on each visit tried to influence her for good, but somehow, though not actually opposed to the truth, the daughter was content to drift on day after day, in the old heathen way, and never really made up her mind to become a Christian.

Some years ago the Christian mother passed away, fully trusting in the Lord she loved and served. On my next visit to Ching-ho, I went to see the daughter, with the hope that sorrow would have softened and opened her heart, and that the passing of her mother would have turned her thoughts heavenwards. She received us in an unusually cold and formal manner, and when we were seated, suddenly said, "Where is my mother now?"

I replied, "Your mother was a worshipper of the True God, and I believe that He has taken her to heaven."

"Do you *know* she is in heaven? *Have you seen her there?*" she asked.

"No, I have not actually seen her there, but our 'Holy Classic' teaches us that all who believe in God and His Christ, when they depart this life, are with Him in the Glory Land. Your mother believed and

passed away believing, so we are quite happy about her now, and you may be happy too.”

“No,” she answered, “I am not happy about her ; indeed, I am most unhappy. I have consulted a spirit medium, and she says my mother is very miserable, as she is neither in heaven nor on earth, but is wandering to and fro, through space, weeping bitterly, searching for a resting-place, but finding none.”

Was it any wonder that this woman would not listen to us as we tried to tell her of the Saviour’s love and grace? The spirit medium had done her evil work only too well, and she refused to listen to any words of comfort we could speak. For years she remained like that, so that we dreaded visiting her house, but lately we went to see her again, and she was more like her old self, friendly and nice, and welcomed us warmly.

We had a quiet talk together in the kitchen, while she lighted the fire to make fresh tea for us. Family troubles and trials, a sick husband, and a wayward, extravagant son are helping to draw her thoughts away from the pleasures of this life, and making her yearn for peace and happiness in the next world. “Life is very hard,” she said. “My mother worshipped your God, and many times she commanded me to do so too. She was very good.”

“Do you know that your mother will rise again?” I said. “If you believe in God too, you will see her again, and be with her for ever in the happy land of heaven.”

“That would be happiness indeed,” she answered, as she escorted us to the door, and said good-bye.

In our work at Ching-ho we constantly visited the house of a Taoist priest. This man’s wife had been

much impressed with the gospel message, and accompanied a Christian woman to church. For months she came quite fairly regularly, and we thought she was really in earnest in hearing and learning the doctrine; then, suddenly, she stopped coming, and although we visited her, as usual, she refused to come any more, saying she did not wish to become a Christian.

One day, passing by her house, we noticed several men and women standing in the doorway looking in; we stood with them and looked.

It was an awful sight! The priest's idol shrine was set in the middle of the guest-hall, and a man was sitting on the very shelf where the idol generally was. He was naked to the waist, arms folded across his chest; his face was changed both in colour and expression, and was the face of an idol. There were dim lights in front of the shrine, the fumes of burning incense sticks filled the hall, and he was undoubtedly a demon-ridden man.

A séance was being held; the people were asking him questions and he was answering them. We stayed neither to see nor hear any more, but hurried away. The whole atmosphere of the place seemed sullied by the presence of the Evil One. Returning the same way a couple of hours later, we again passed the house; the man was sitting in the doorway, clothed and in his right mind again. We knew he was the brother-in-law of the woman who had begun to come to church, and had often talked to him before, but, until now, we had not known he was a spirit medium. We spoke a few solemn words to him of the danger of tampering with spiritism. He said he had invoked a *good* spirit, to enable him to cure a bad case of sickness, and that it was a good work he was doing.

What could one do but witness to the One True and Living God, and warn him against the wiles of the Evil One? We knew then what special power was preventing his sister-in-law from deciding to be a child of God.

At one time I lived with a Biblewoman in a tiny rented cottage, next door to the house of a spirit medium. She very often visited us, and we never lost an opportunity of warning and exhorting her to give up her wicked way of living. One day the sound of bitter weeping attracted our attention, and on going to learn the cause we found there was a séance being held next door. The medium was already under control; she was weeping loudly, as if in great trouble. It was an appalling sight! Her face was deathly, her eyes were looking, staring, but seeing nothing; she kept her head down most of the time, and was swaying backwards and forwards while the people were burning papers and asking questions, which she answered between her paroxysms of weeping. We waited to see the end of the séance. She suddenly stopped weeping and then seemed to wriggle through to consciousness, the deathly pallor of her face slowly changed to its natural hue again; she sat up, but for a little time seemed too exhausted to speak or notice any one. Presently she was asked why she had wept so sorely, and replied that she had no consciousness of weeping, and remembered nothing of what had happened during the trance.

Spirit mediums do not easily become Christians; they sometimes come to services and even eagerly listen to the Gospel, but they generally fall away or make up their minds that they cannot remain mediums if they worship God.



THE ABBOT OF A FAMOUS BUDDHIST MONASTERY

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It seems almost impossible for them to get free, once having given themselves over, body, soul, and spirit, to the domination of the Evil One. Some years ago, when preaching to a group of women in a village, one of those present happened to be a spirit medium. We did not know the circumstances or condition of any of our listeners, but one in the group seemed to listen with special interest and intelligence; seeing this, we directed special attention towards her. One of the others promptly said, "You need not trouble about her, she cannot worship your God." "Why not?" was asked. "She is a spirit medium," was the reply.

We then turned to the woman in question and pleaded with her to give it up and turn to the Saviour. She said it was no use—no one could save her; she could never give it up. We were loath to let her go in this way, and again earnestly pleaded with her, but she said she could not get free; then we warned her of the consequences of refusal, most solemnly, but it was of no avail. We questioned her as to how she began this intercourse with spirits. She told us that at first she only tried it for play, then, when she found she could do it, she began earning money by that means. "And now," she added, "I must go down any time he calls me; day or night, I must go down." By the "he" she meant her special "familiar." She had become a slave, one of those who had been "taken captive"; it was a terribly sad and hopeless thing, but we could do nothing for her.

The Chinese Christians are very wise; they say that no man or woman *can be a Christian* and be a medium, or consult spirit mediums at the same time—the two

conditions are quite incompatible. Spiritism is no “New Revelation” to the Chinese, for contact and intercourse with both good and bad spirits from the other world have been in existence in China for thousands of years, and the result of such intercourse is a state of the grossest sin, impurity of life, and utter darkness, superstition, and heathenism.

CHAPTER VII

PEARLS AND THEIR POLISHING

PEARLS are found deep down, hidden away on the bed of the ocean, in their little homes of shell, where only the pearl fishers can find them.

The oysters are brought to the surface, the shells opened, and the pearls taken out into the light of day. Then begins the work of cutting, polishing, and perfecting the gems. I have read that no unskilled hand is allowed to touch the beautiful things; the outer covering of each has to be carefully detached, and when the heart of the pearl is reached a specially prepared silver knife in the skilful fingers of an expert is necessary for the severing of the delicate skin that hides the inner beauty of the gem.

We, also, are searching for "pearls," and are finding them, too, "deep down." They are hidden away in the most unlikely places, up and down the lonely mountains, and here and there among the fruitful valleys, but always, *always* in the deepest ocean of black heathenism and sin. We should *never* find them or even recognise them were it not that the Master Himself yearns over them and wishes them found, and comes with us on our journeys. He it is who points them out to us, and the cleansing and the polishing He entrusts to none but Himself. No other hand but His must use the knife, no other hand but His is delicate enough or tender enough to polish and

prepare the gems destined one day “to shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever.”

It may be of interest to hear something of the way in which the pearls are being polished.

A few women who have been “found” in poor and sordid homes are gathered together to spend three days studying the Epistle to the Ephesian Church. It is the very first time of reading Saint Paul’s great letter; every sentence stands out fresh and new, and comes as a God-breathed, personal message.

As the glorious truths of this book vibrate round the heart-strings of these children in the faith, one can almost feel the yearning desire of some to be better, purer women, more worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus, and this desire often finds expression in tearful pleading in our times of prayer at the close of each “study.”

In the first chapter, the Doctrine of Predestination and Election, round which so much ecclesiastical controversy has centred throughout the ages, presents no difficulty to their simple faith, for they just look up into the Father’s face and thank Him for the love that chose them out and called them to be “King’s daughters,” while they were yet bowing down to dumb idols.

After one such study was over, a woman came to my room with a small gift of eggs and rice; she said, “I am a poor woman, but my Heavenly Father has blessed me and my family. He has chosen you to teach us, and you have chosen me, and I am going out to choose others for the Kingdom of God.” The polishing had begun in her heart and life! Again and again I have noticed in her prayers and witnessing to

others, how two truths have mightily gripped her—the first being the Fatherhood of God, the other, that she had been “chosen.” Chapter vi. had its own message for her, too, because of her difficult family circumstances. She had no son of her own, but her adopted son constantly quarrelled with her husband, and the home harmony was thus marred by this “little rift within the lute.” “If *only* my husband and son were at peace with one another, I should be the happiest woman on earth!” she said. “Will you pray to the Heavenly Father for them, that they may give and take more one with another?” and then, after a moment, she added, “Quarrels are like weeds, they grow of themselves; they ought to be pulled up out of the garden of my little home.”

When we came to chapter ii., verse fifteen, and the sentence “abolished the enmity” was being discussed, and the message applied to personal experience, one of the women suddenly exclaimed, “But what if others have enmity towards us? How can one *not* have enmity in one’s heart?” It was her very first time of hearing the precept, “Love your enemies,” and she was solemnised into quiet thought. At the close of the study, one of the other women said to her, “Come with me to see that woman you are not friends with, and make peace with her before the sun goes down.” They went together, sin was confessed, and harmony restored.

When we came to chapter iv., dealing with the gifts bestowed upon the Church for the uplift and blessing of all, one woman was able to give testimony to the gift of faith-prevailing prayer. She told us of one beautiful answer in a time of special need. Just as she was beginning to emerge from the thickest

heathen darkness, her mother-in-law died. This old lady had been stone-deaf for years, and, to her daughter-in-law's great grief, had never been able to hear the message of love and forgiveness.

It is customary for near relatives to worship at the coffin of the dead and to offer up prayers to the idols on their behalf; and for a daughter-in-law to refuse to do so would be considered a serious breach of filial duty. This Christian woman's husband and relatives tried, therefore, to compel her to do so, and warned her of the dire results that would follow such a refusal through the anger of the idols and spirits of dead ancestors. She kept true to the Lord, however, and boldly testified before them all, that she trusted in the protection of God alone.

A few days after the funeral, her only little granddaughter became seriously ill; the neighbours gathered together and reproached her for not worshipping idols. “I was weighed down with trouble,” she said, “and had no other Christian woman in the village to help me. Then I suddenly remembered that I had been warned that God tests faith by allowing sickness to come; so through the long, dark night I lifted up my voice aloud, and cried, ‘Lord Jesus, do not test my faith in this way, for I am true to You, my heart is true to You; heal my child, and forgive her sins and mine.’” Do you wonder that a full and gracious answer came swiftly in the perfect restoration of the child by the dawn? At the close of the lesson, two or three of the older women went to a temple in the town to share their gifts of love and prayer with a poor, friendless, sick young man of whom they had heard, who was lying there in need of help.

Lui-di Seng is a blind woman of sixty-five, though she looks much older than that. We "found" her one wintry afternoon in the blind settlement close to Ching-ho City. We had been trailing up and down her village, seeking for pearls, but, alas! finding none, for quite a while, when we accidentally came upon the entrance to her house. It was a miserably poor, dilapidated place, with dark and dirty little rooms opening close to one another, and in the centre the idol shrine, with its three or four ugly images, covered apparently with the dust of ages. We greeted the few women there, but they were not even interested enough in us to ask us to sit down, so we stood and answered their questions: "Why have you come here? What is your business?" One of these women attracted us much; she looked intelligent and bright in spite of the poor blind eyes. Quietly we told her of the the beauty of the home above, and of the hope of all who believe and accept the Lord Jesus as their Redeemer and Saviour. She asked a question or two first, and then said, "I believe what you say, and I will worship." We then and there taught her to pray, just one or two sentences repeated over and over again, until they were memorised. Then we left her, promising to come and lead her to church the following Sunday.

She was ready, dressed in her very best clothes, waiting for us, when we arrived, and we led her by the hand along the principal street of the town to our little church-house.

Many people came to their doors and asked where we were taking her, to be answered with the words, "We are leading her to where she will hear of the Way to Heaven; will you not come too?" From that day

she came regularly, and is now a baptized member of the church, and takes a pride in her title of "Church-Mother!"

Lui-di Seng's capacity for memorising is truly wonderful, although she is quite illiterate; she has memorised most of the Morning Prayer Service, numbers of hymns, and portions of Scripture, including the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, which she loves to repeat.

One day lately she looked so decidedly dull and unhappy that I asked her what the trouble was! She said she feared her "time to go to sleep" was near, because she had been dreaming strange dreams. "Three times I smelt coffin oil," she said, "which is a sure sign of my going to sleep soon." The Chinese do not use the word "death" if they can possibly help it—they sometimes say "sun-down" or "gone afar," or "not present," but very seldom use so crude a word as "death."

This old lady later on, in the course of conversation, told me of the following way in which the Lord had rebuked her; as she told the story the old face lighted up and the sightless eyes almost twinkled at the humour of the incident! She had only one hen, and this particular hen was very naughty, and insisted on breaking the Fourth Commandment by laying an egg on the Sabbath Day! Once or twice the precious egg was stolen during the blind woman's absence at church, so on this particular Sunday she had planned to go back after morning service, though she generally stayed at church all day in order to be present at afternoon service too. Another Christian woman said to her that that would only count as "half a worship" and not as a "whole day's worship," adding

that "a whole worship was more important than an egg!" But, alas! the egg gained the day, for she hurried home after morning service, reaching there just in time for the laying of the egg. The egg was laid, truly, and a beautiful large one it was—but the hen died immediately afterwards!

Close by there is an earnest Christian woman living. All her family are baptized, all are careful about keeping Sunday as a holy day, and all come regularly to church both morning and afternoon. They are poor, but hardworking and industrious; the mother keeps fowls, ducks, and pigs, while the father and son work all day in the fields, or carry loads for others, to earn their living.

It was Sunday afternoon, and with it had come the chance to buy three tiny pigs more cheaply than usual. They had been watching for such a chance for some time, so that when it came on Sunday there was much perplexity. Husband and wife consulted together, and at last decided to buy them. A few days of careful feeding, and then the three little piggies sickened and died! "My Heavenly Father rebuked me," she said, "for breaking the Fourth Commandment. I did wrong in buying them on Sunday; but," she added, "God had mercy on me too, for the loss would have been greater had I fed them until they were grown up. My Heavenly Father is very good to me." Her simple child heart had begun to find out "the comfort of the rod"—"Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Sharing the home life of a beginner, one sees some of the many methods by which the pearl is being polished and perfected for the future in the Glory Land of heaven. Faith begins to grow, the light

within becomes brighter, more patience is shown in dealing with the things of every day, heathen habits are slowly discarded, as the pathway grows clearer.

The polishing began on that big day when the idols were taken down from the carved shelf at the head of the guest-hall and burned with fire ; the incense bowls containing earth in which the lighted incense sticks were stuck taken away and destroyed ; the idol shelf left, as the Chinese say, “cold as ice,” and the Ten Commandments written in large characters on a scroll hung up instead, over the carved shelf.

That was the day when Satan fell down from his “high place” in the home life—the first big break with idolatry. What of the faith that made such a break possible ? Will it not be counted unto them for righteousness ?

I am thinking of one old gentleman, a herb doctor by profession, who, before he became a Christian, was a well-known gambler. We stayed at his house, shared his life, and watched with much sympathy his conflicts and struggles. One day the following conversation took place :

“Elder brother, what about gambling ? Do you think it is consistent with Christian profession ? ”

“No, sister ; God has taught me that gambling is great sin ; I must give it up, or I cannot expect peace in my inside heart.”

“Elder brother, how did the Lord teach you ? ”

“Through a severe illness ; I was very near ‘passing.’ God showed me that He was displeased with gambling and covetousness, so I confessed my sins, and now I am healed and have peace.”

“Elder brother, the pastor is going to hold a

baptismal service at the central church next Sunday ; what about you ? ”

“ Last time he refused to baptize me, but I am going to try again.”

Next day an itinerant tailor was called in, and a new suit of clothes made up—a nice slate-grey, the favourite colour of the old gentleman ; and when the day came, a sedan-chair was hired. Dressed in his new suit, the old gentleman called us in to see and admire ; then we all escorted him to his waiting sedan-chair.

Before he stepped into his chair, he placed his two hands together, shook them in greeting, bowed with stately grace, and said, “ Please pray for me, that God will protect me.”

“ Elder brother,” we replied, “ we will pray for you that when you return to your village you may be a pillar in the Church.”

The coolies lifted up his chair, and with the beautiful Christian salutation of “ Peace ! Peace ! ” he went the thirteen miles to the central church to confess publicly his faith in the One True God, and his break with the devil and all idolatry.

Our outward-bound steamer was anchored a little way from the shore at an Eastern port, and we were looking over the side of the boat, watching the crowds of small craft and steamers hurrying hither and thither in the bay. Not far away there was a small rowing-boat, in which were two men, one of whom was a diver. We watched him put on his curious diver’s dress and adjust the apparatus. When all was ready, a ladder was let down over the side of the boat into the water, and the diver began his descent into the deep. Presently he was lost to sight, but the other man left in

the boat kept in touch with him all the time. He moved the connecting link and his boat about, for what seemed quite a long time to us who were watching.

Presently the diver's head appeared again ; he came up the ladder slowly, and was helped by his colleague into the boat. His hand held a large bucket of coal which he had gathered down below ! What struck *me* most was the fact that the diver's success, yea, more, his very life, depended on the watchful care and co-operation of his colleague in the boat. Is there any message there, for those in the homelands, who send others into the deeps of heathenism in search of living “ pearls ” ?

CHAPTER VIII

“NEW YEAR—COME! BRING PROSPERITY!”

IT is Chinese New Year time, and as the days are given over to feasting and visiting, our routine work has slackened for a while, and we are able to plan sometimes for a quiet afternoon at home for letter-writing, sewing, mending, and generally setting our house in order, in preparation for the spring term's work.

The mission-house in Pine River City “sits in the south and faces the north,” as the Chinese describe it, and is conveniently near the West Gate of the city, the picturesque battlemented walls of which enclose about 12,000 friendly people, who have crept into our hearts and remain there.

There is a nice, fairly wide verandah round the south side of the house, which helps to keep off some of the fierceness of the sun's rays in spring and summer-time; it is always in use, and we fully enjoy the beautiful view seen from there—towards the south-west, Pagoda Hill, and a part of the river on its way to join the Min at Kien-ning. Towards the east lies the gap between the mountains leading out to the Ching-ho City road, while, straight in front, looms up Dang-Lu with his attendant foot-hills. There is something mystic about Dang-Lu, I think; he has a personality all his own. Sometimes he stands there, clear and distinct, with the central peak almost touching the sky-line;

at other times he is "not at home" to us, and where he should be there is, instead, an impenetrable wall of grey cloud; again, one is looking at the most charming colour effects, ranging from pale greens, warm browns, to the crest of deep, dark blue, deepening in the shadowy clefts and creases of the mountain; or he has wrapped himself in a fleecy mantle of snow-white wool, his shoulders completely hidden, with just the crown of his head showing, and before one has had time to absorb all the beauty of the moment, another change has taken place, and one is looking at a clearly outlined mass of deep purple mountains, touched here and here with the sunset afterglow, beneath a wonderful evening sky of amber and amethyst.

We once went in sedan-chairs to the foot of Dang-Lu, climbed and picnicked in the large temple on the top. The resident monks were then building a new wing to the temple; it looked so cool and inviting, quite an ideal place for us to spend a month in the hottest weather, but when this suggestion was made to the monks, they said the spirits of the idols were unwilling, and would leave the temple if we stayed there!

I am writing this in my own room; it is such a pretty, bright room, with two windows, one looking down on the weather-well of the house, where pot-palms, ferns, and flowers are growing; the other having a glorious view of several ranges of mountains stretching away to the western horizon. The sun is shining now, and the birds are singing merrily. Although it is cold January weather, with sharp frosts at night, yet there is a certain balminess in the air to-day which makes one feel that spring is just round the corner. According to the Chinese calendar, spring "burst forth" while we were yet in the twelfth moon,

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and the seasonableness of the seasons always corresponds with the Chinese dates. For instance, when we get into the melting hot days of late spring, and early summer, we are often comforted by our Chinese friends prophesying that at a certain feast, or date, the weather will be cool for a few days, and it always is!

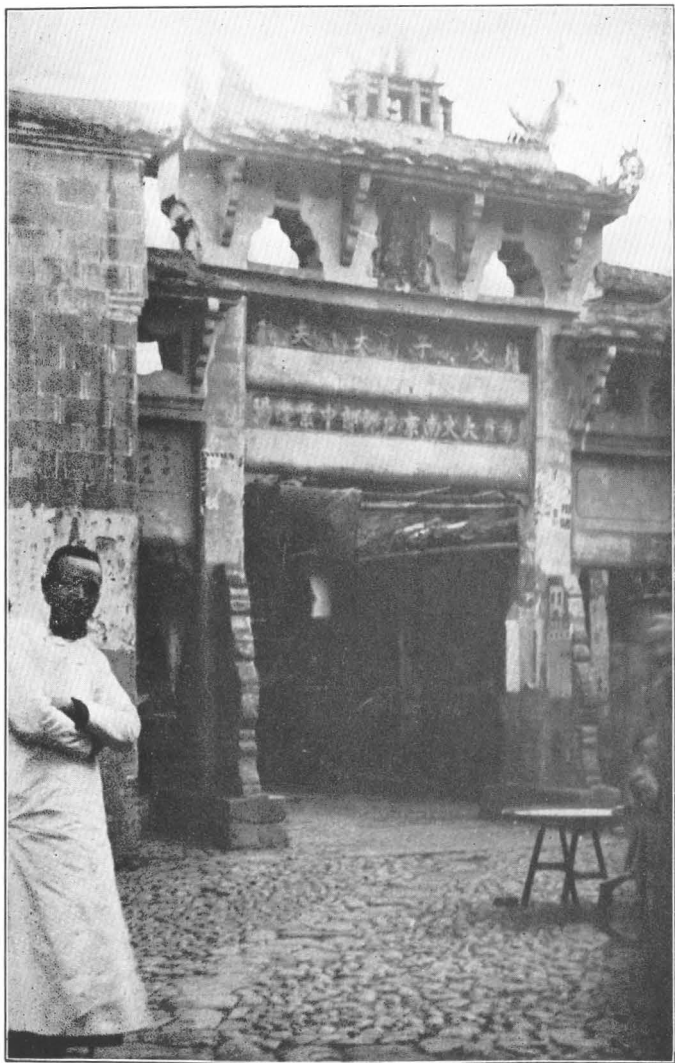
The floor and window-sills of my room were originally painted pink, with brown borders, and the walls were pink-washed. The Chinese paint has faded now to a curious, dull mauve tint, and the pretty pink walls have become almost white, but nothing can dim the blessed sunshine, nor dull the sweet carolling of the birds, nor hush the murmuring of the river in the distance as it tumbles swiftly over the breakwater beside the mill, nor take from me the sweetness of the fresh, pure air coming through both windows. There is no fireplace, nor is one needed, for I have, instead, under my writing-table, a large pottery bowl set into a bamboo basket, filled with hot, glowing charcoal. This is my fire-basket, and it has a handle, so it can be carried about when necessary. It gives out quite enough heat, and is much more convenient than a fire, which has to stay wherever it is lighted! On the coldest days the fire-basket comes with us wherever we go—upstairs and downstairs, and when we go visiting in the near neighbours' houses. It even comes with us to church!

The only time when one really enjoys a proper fire is on returning on a very cold day from an itinerating tour. A peep, on those occasions, through the guest-hall door into the sitting-room beyond reveals a wealth of greenery, and perhaps flowers, a bright wood fire blazing a welcome, the tea-table drawn up; chairs

with comfortable backs, a bundle of unopened letters and papers on a table near by, and a nice long evening in front of one. A fire, under those circumstances, is just the very essence of luxury, and is in pleasant contrast to the roughness of country inns and rat-infested lofts! Otherwise, and for working days, a fire-basket for me!

There is another luxury, too—the opportunity of conversing in one’s own native tongue after, it may be, a month of speaking in, and listening to, the Chinese language alone; this is a luxury much appreciated, and taken fullest advantage of—far into the night, maybe!

Our flower-garden is looking rather woebegone just now—few flowers are brave enough to raise their little heads and face the cold wind and frosty air, but there are still some evergreen shrubs and plants. The most woebegone of all are the banana trees; these children of the sunny south are not accustomed to the severity of our colder mountain climate. King Frost has touched every one of their beautiful, large leaves with his silent but destructive fingers, with the result that each tree is clothed in a bundle of the most disreputable-looking rags! One morning, when talking to the watchman-gardener, the stripping off of these rags was suggested to him, but he held up his hands in horror, saying, “Oh, a thousand million times, no! If you strip them of their clothes, they will all die of the cold, in this frost!” And so the rags remain, until the day that Mother Nature goes to her treasure-box, dips down, and brings forth new spring robes of emerald green. King Frost’s fingers are not always so destructive, for he has sometimes touched the commonest shrubs and plants with his fairy wand and



A NOBLE ARCHWAY LEADING TO SOUTH STREET,
PINE RIVER CITY

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made every branch and every leaf shine and sparkle in the sunshine, until the very cabbages have been transformed into things of glistening beauty.

Cabbages!—I have got so far in my writing when an interruption comes. A delicate woman with a badly ulcerated foot has come for medicine. She wishes to come into the school and stay with us for a while, so that her foot may be treated properly and attended to daily. My writing has to be put down, and the patient cared for. She has a very sore, painful foot, and to get at the place, the pretty embroidered stocking and the wrappings that hide the bound foot have to be taken off, disclosing all the hideous ugliness of the poor, broken, deformed foot. Surely the Chinese Mrs. Grundy must be an appalling tyrant!

Near some of the government schools, and in other public places, there is usually to be seen a small brick and mortar shrine, with a receptacle for the burning of wastepaper, on which there is Chinese writing or printing. One has often seen old men carefully gathering up scattered bits of wastepaper, and burning them in these receptacles, which are built for the purpose, as an act of merit. One of the reasons given for doing this was, that if a woman's bound feet stepped, by mistake, on the printing or writing, the desecration would be so great that she might be struck with blindness for the rest of her days, through the anger of the gods. The Anti-Footbinding League is certainly doing a good work in the Port cities and larger inland towns of our Province, but as yet its influence has not reached the villages, hamlets, and smaller towns. Christianity is, however, busy with this work, for almost all the Christian women are

required to unbind their feet before Baptism ; they, in their turn, influence the younger generation, and thus public opinion against footbinding is being formed and propagated. This young woman's foot has been washed, a dressing put on, and she is now resting comfortably in a room close to the Biblewoman's, who has promised to look after her—and my writing can now be resumed.

No ! there is another call for help ! This time it is a neighbour, who wants to hide from the fury of a gambling husband who has threatened to kill her. “ She is terribly frightened and asks us to save her life,” says the Biblewoman. Writing is laid aside once more. I find the woman's husband has been gambling day and night ; he had suddenly gained a pile of money and, in a fit of generosity, had given a good part of it to his wife to keep for herself ; now he has once more lost it all and has come back to his home, in a fierce temper, demanding the money he had given her. It has been already spent on necessaries for the household, so his wife has had to flee to us for refuge ! She is very frightened, and begs to be allowed to stay ! She takes her heavy silver bracelets off her arms, and gives them to me to keep for her until a brighter day dawns, as she fears that her husband may snatch them, pawn them, and gamble with the proceeds. Of course we must allow her to remain for a few days, until her husband's gambling fit is over, and then we shall send her home, accompanied by a peace escort ! She, too, is at present sitting in the Biblewoman's kitchen, weeping out her heart's trouble and sorrow to the sympathetic women gathered there. She is one who has been worked with and prayed for in days gone by, and we hope she may now, “ through much

tribulation,” be led to repentance, and give up all sin, and enter, by faith in Christ Jesus, into the Kingdom of God.

Another call! Our country Chinese do not knock at doors! Indeed, we have neither knocker nor bell! Their own hospitable doors are always wide open, and visitors of all ranks and classes may walk right in and be sure of a welcome. The Western idea of a man’s house, with its shut and double-barred doors, being his castle, or rather his fortress—to which there is no admittance save by the grace of those within!—would find no favour in the country districts of this most friendly, democratic, and hospitable land. We all live close together, walk in and out of one another’s houses without let or hindrance, in the most neighbourly manner; even our possessions (in the eyes of the Chinese) being intended for the common good of all!

However, we sometimes allow Western ideas and tastes to sway our actions, and on those occasions do dearly love to get on the far side of shut doors; so what *can* the Chinese do except call? Which they do! And what can *we* do—but answer?

In our guest-hall there are three respectably dressed farmers from the country, who rise and bow politely in response to my greeting. The eldest then said, “We come from Cu-dong. You do not know me, but you know my son, who last year began to worship your God. Alas! he will not work on the farm any more, and we wish to invite the evangelist of the church to come and see him and exhort him.”

“Why will he not work? Worshippers of God are enjoined to be diligent. Is he ill?”

“ No ; he has no illness. He lies in bed all day, and will neither work nor play.”

“ Is his brain affected, do you think ? ”

“ We do not know ; he was perfectly well until he began to worship your God.”

We told this perplexed old man to send his son to the church-house to stay with the evangelist for a few days, and promised to try to teach and exhort him to be filial and do his work ; and also to pray with and for him. Then the visitors thanked us and left.

After they had gone I inquired from others about this young man, who had “ struck work ” when he became a worshipper ; and found that his parents were angry with him because he had turned from idols and broken his vegetarian vow against their will, and, in spite of much petty persecution, had insisted on becoming a worshipper of the true God. He lives in a lonely mountain village, twenty-one miles away from the central church, is only twenty-one years of age, and the one worshipper in his district. This young man has only the slightest knowledge of the Christian doctrine, and is a very babe in the faith, so we fear that the tremendous opposition of his family and village have been too much for him, that his health has probably broken down, and also that he is mentally depressed.

Once more there is an interruption ; this time from a dear little monkey, who, with a Mongolian goat, is giving a theatrical performance at our very own front gate. “ Oh, come quickly and see ! ” called out the children excitedly, and I went quickly and saw !

Now the bell is ringing for supper, and my “ quiet afternoon ” is over. Good-bye to writing for to-day !

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Chinese New Year! What a busy, noisy time it is! A mixture of joy and sorrow, feasting and poverty, anxiety and pleasure! Towards the close of the year, shopkeepers and creditors begin to get busy with their accounts; men are employed to go from village to village and from house to house, paying and collecting debts, and frequently one hears from all classes of people the expression, “This year we are passing very tightly,” which is the Chinese way of saying it is hard to make both ends meet.

They have always borrowed from each other and always will borrow, and doubtless there would be “no flavour” in life if their needs were wholly satisfied and opportunities of borrowing and lending were taken away! The Chinese (at least our particular Chinese) being of a speculative mind, and having the gambling instinct strongly inherent in them, are always prepared and willing to take large risks with their money, their opportunities, their happiness—even with their lives. We have noticed again and again this characteristic in their dealings with one another and with ourselves in the little ordinary daily happenings, as well as in the big things of life; their instinct is always to chance the reckoning day. Marriage, even, is largely a game of chance with them. They scarcely ever make full inquiries beforehand and trust the choice and arrangements, especially in the case of second marriages, largely to the hired “matchmakers” or “go-betweens,” often with dire results and lifelong unhappiness.

In visiting, one day, we came to a house where we had not been before. A most extraordinary-looking young woman received us; she made vocal sounds in a whisper, but in no language or dialect we had ever

heard of ; she helped out her words with signs, inviting us to be seated. Presently a nice, elderly woman came in, and we asked her who the other woman was. She answered that she was her own husband's secondary wife ; that *she* had no children, so had consented to her husband marrying a second wife. He had sent a hired "matchmaker" or "go-between" to obtain a wife for him in another town ; but when the new "secondary wife" arrived at her husband's house, they found she was stone deaf, partly dumb, and quite foolish ! The disappointment of the husband and first wife was very great, especially as a large sum of money had been paid for the young woman, and their grief was so fresh and poignant that as the poor woman told the story of the deception practised on them by the "go-between," she could not control her bitter weeping—but there it is ! both she and her husband risked the happiness of the home by the careless transaction. Neither of them had seen or heard anything of this woman before the marriage arrangements were completed, and the "secondary wife" had arrived at her new home.

The same characteristic often influences the Chinese in their thoughts of Eternity. They are ready to chance what the next life will mean for them, of joy or sorrow ; one has heard both men and women say, "Eternity ! Oh, one must chance that !" or again, "The next life cannot be worse than the present ; one must chance that !"

Money anxieties go side by side with preparations for feasting at the close of the year. It is especially the children's festival, and they certainly have a good time. They are all dressed in their best, with extra large pockets bulging in every direction, filled with

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quantities of nuts, cakes, sweets, and other good things, all of which they partake of without limit, let, or hindrance!

Anxieties about the non-payment of debts, for the present at least, end at midnight on New Year's Eve, for until then, those who have unpaid debts are obliged to keep their doors open, to enable debt-collectors to come and go freely, even if no money is forthcoming.

In most families there are happy reunions of relatives who come home to be with their own kith and kin for the “passing” of the old year. At sunset on New Year's Eve the whole family sits down to a good hot supper, the last meal of the old year. It is eaten to the accompaniment of explosions of string after string of fire crackers, which add to the happiness and noise the Chinese so dearly love. Supper consists of fowl, duck, pounded rice cakes, vermicelli, and of course pork, without which no feast is complete. Night has fallen by now, but it has only brought quiet and peace to the homes of those who have settled their debts, and, perhaps, to most of the Christian homes! A non-Christian woman gave an unsolicited testimony to the greater honesty and better management of the Christians in paying up, as far as possible, earlier in the year when she said, “You worshippers of God can ‘pass’ the year in peace, for you have no debts.” This statement is not true of *all* Christians, unfortunately, though we wish it were!

One of our Christian “church-mothers” told me that before she became a Christian she dreaded the end of the year, because she had so many debts, and no money to pay them, but that since she became a “worshipper” the year was “very good to pass.” “I have great peace, and my debts are all paid,” she

said simply, and in explanation of this added, "God helps my sons to earn more, and we manage better."

Footsteps pass swiftly up and down the streets, lights flash from the prettily coloured paper lanterns, and flaring torches of pitch-pine wood, carried by the passers-by; now and again one hears loud voices talking, sometimes quarrelling; creditors and debtors wrangling about their accounts; worst of all, the voices of eager and excited men at the gambling-tables.

At midnight the front doors of the houses are opened wide, and the clean, fresh air of the New Year is allowed to enter; then the invitation is spoken—"New Year, Come! Bring Prosperity!" Strings of crackers are fired off, and with a deafening noise, and much idolatry, all welcome in the New Year. Each wearied household then sits down to a simple vegetarian breakfast, and retires to rest at last, to sleep late into the morning of New Year's Day.

New Year's Day is always rather dull and often wet; the shops are closed for five days, and no work or labour is done. It is the gambler's harvest-time, and the first few days of the New Year are sullied and spoiled by this sin.

During these days the law of the land allows public gambling in the streets and houses (presumably because they cannot prevent it); gambling-tables are set up in the streets at strategic points and are filled with gamblers, while crowds stand looking on; even the small boys have low tables and stools provided for them, in charge of professional gamblers, who teach them how to play.

The precincts of the temples are also filled with men, gambling in front of the idols; indeed, most of them

invoke the aid of the idols to help them win—a fact that calls forth the scorn of the Biblewomen in their preaching. They never fail to make the most of it, saying, “The idols are not *worthy* of worship, for they never care about nor control sin of any kind; gamblers may gamble in front of them, sinners may sin in their presence, but they neither know nor care”; with scornful emphasis came the final words, “Who would be willing to worship those kinds of spirits?”

Other folks pass the day quietly; no beast may be killed, nor may knives be used for any purpose whatever on that day, and all partake of a spare vegetarian diet. No ugly word may be spoken, nor may the word “death” or “dying” be used in conversation; the sick may not complain, and where there is sorrow in the home, it may not be spoken of or shared with the neighbours, *just for that one day*. All conversation on New Year’s Day consists of mutual compliments, congratulations, and pretty phraseology; thieves even respect New Year’s Day, and it is said to be quite unnecessary to lock your doors or windows for the twenty-four hours!

The days that follow are busy ones: friends and acquaintances pay calls of ceremony on one another; visiting-cards are sent here and there, and there is much elaborate etiquette observed. It is a time given over to feasting and social pleasures.

In our mission compound, New Year’s Day is a very quiet and happy one. To begin with, we all dress in our best clothes. The Chinese like to have something new for the season. The cook, resplendent in a new blue suit, and the watchman, are the first to greet us, with low bows and the words, “We greet the year,” to which, of course, we respond in the same way.

After breakfast and prayers are over, all the women and children in the compound call on us, and, bowing with great dignity, proceed to “greet the year.” We return the compliment, and entertain them with tea and the proper “goodies” of the season, and are quite as particular as they are about the ceremonial etiquette to be observed. Chinese women are entirely free from self-consciousness and are most dignified in manners and movements, though they are rather stiff and ungraceful, due, in all probability, to their having had to balance themselves on their tiny bound feet when young; the children comport themselves with the prettiest dignity and unconscious grace. Later in the day we return the calls, and visit the same women in the compound schoolhouse, and the watchman’s family in their house, receiving from them a repetition of exactly the same kind of entertainment as we have already given, including the compliments! The rest of the day is quietly spent, and the evening closes with the singing of New Year’s hymns and prayer.

CHAPTER IX

“CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN!”

RAIN, rain, and more rain! It certainly knows how to rain out here; the very heavens themselves seem to be descending on our devoted heads, and we are cooped up in one room, in a tiny hamlet amongst the mountains, weather-bound. There are three of us—two Chinese women and myself—all sleeping, living, and eating in this one and only available room, so we are company for one another. Wet weather never keeps the small boys away; *they* are always with us, and when not actually playing in our room, are either trying to break in the door, or else are peering through the holes and cracks in the plank walls. I wish we could gather them into a class for teaching, but we have already tried to do so and failed, these special boys being exceptionally wild and unwilling to be taught.

In itinerating in heathen villages we can very rarely work amongst the children, it being most necessary to win the confidence and friendship of the parents and elders first; when *they* are won, the children are won too; then all learn together, the children in their homes helping their elders to memorise what they have been taught during the day. We sometimes even find it necessary to try and win the men over on our side first, for if they are unfriendly or opposed to the doctrine, they prevent us having

opportunities of preaching to the women, frightening them with foolish and weird fairy-tales about the foreign women.

On one occasion we visited a far-away mountain village ; it was situated high up, and the getting there was a difficult bit of work. We had to climb a steep mountain by an uncertain pathway, leading along the edge of a precipice, and overlooking a deep ravine ; it was as difficult of access as if it were a fortress. We reached the tiny, poor-looking village at last ; it seemed to be uninhabited at first, our approach having been observed by the children, who, when they saw us, fled in mortal terror to their homes, calling out as they ran, “ The Barbarians have come ; the Barbarians have come ! ” The said barbarians walked slowly, and rather gingerly, to the gateway of the village, wondering much whether the dogs would consider it their duty to resist the invaders !

A couple of none too friendly-looking men were standing there, but not a solitary woman was to be seen. One of these men was middle-aged and tall, with the pale, refined, rather pronounced features of a scholar. He came forward and politely asked what we wanted there, and where we had come from ? We answered all his questions in our very blindest Chinese ! He was then asked, what was the name of his village ? “ The Hall of Heaven,” he answered, “ is the name of our village.”

“ It is well named, Teacher, and very appropriate to its position, for it is almost as hard to reach as heaven itself ! ”

“ Ah, no one can get to heaven,” he said ; “ the most we can expect is to be kept from going to hell.”

A few words were then spoken telling him of the

way to heaven, and a passage of Scripture selected for him to read. When he had read, and turned the leaves of the Book aimlessly for a moment or so, he handed it back, saying, “Your doctrine is good, but we have no use for it here, for we worship Heaven and Earth.”

In the meantime, one brave and inquisitive woman had sauntered out to the gateway to look on, and the Biblewoman entered into conversation with her; then she turned to me, saying, “This woman is inviting us to come and rest at her house; I know some of her friends in Pine River City.” Our friend, the scholar, made no objection, so, politely bowing, we left him there and followed the woman to her house, where she welcomed us most kindly and gave us fresh, hot tea. The doorway of the guest-hall quickly filled with women who looked like a flock of frightened sheep; they all kept a distance from the visitors, and from the safe vantage-ground of the open doorway fired interminable questions at us. We tried hard to arrest and concentrate their attention on the message of love and salvation we had brought to them, but their minds were too disturbed to listen, or take it in, and the last words we heard as we left that village were, “Tell the men, *they* will understand; women understand nothing except how to eat rice!”

Occasionally we happen upon an unusually friendly village, and then we make the very most of our time with the children; quite lately we had such an opportunity, and one whole afternoon was given up to teaching a band of the dearest, most friendly little boys and girls. Some sat on low children’s chairs and stools, others on the threshold of the door, while a couple of much-amused elders stood by. We had a

very happy time with them ; they asked funny puzzling questions and made the prettiest comments on what they heard. Such opportunities are very rare indeed. It was a great joy to meet children who were not afraid that the foreigner would gouge out their eyes and hearts to make medicine of them—an awful idea, but very prevalent in all the country districts still.

It was in this district that one evening, after we had been telling and expounding to a crowd of women and men something of the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ when on earth, suddenly a little blind boy of about thirteen years of age pushed through the crowd and eagerly asked, "Can you heal my eyes? Can you make me see?" He had such an expectant, wistful little face that one felt quite broken-hearted at one's inability to help him. He was quite blind. It is very difficult to make people understand that the age of such miracles has passed away, especially when the *need* for them has *never* passed away. One wonders sometimes, *has* it really passed away, or are we only making excuses for our lack of spiritual gifts?

The rain continues to pour, and we cannot go about amidst the pools of mud and water leading from house to house in our Chinese cloth-soled shoes, so, while I write, one of the Biblewomen is teaching two young men to read and memorise the Lord's Prayer. They are ignorant country boys, with no schooling whatever, but they have made up their minds to worship God and are anxious to learn all they can while we remain here.

The other Biblewoman is engaged in telling the "Good News" to one or two women who live in the same house with us and are interested in the "wondrous story."

We were invited to come here by one of the village elders, a non-Christian, friendly man, whom we met in the house of a Christian relative in another village. We quite expected to stay at his house, but it is probable that he gave the invitation without first obtaining the consent of the rest of his household, for when we arrived at the village our friend was waiting for us at the cross-roads, and escorted us *here* instead. It is the house of a Taoist priest who is a friend of the village elder. There is a large shrine in the guest-hall with several idols, and the paraphernalia necessary for his “ office ” by the side—all covered with dust and grime. His aid is invoked for the recovery of the sick and for a happy “ passing ” for the dying.

The marvel is that this priest allows us to stay here ; we noticed that both he and his wife seemed uneasy and frightened when we arrived, and rushed at once to light incense sticks in front of the guest-hall shrine, and indeed all over the house, as they feared that our being there and preaching the gospel would anger the “ spirits of the idols,” who would flee away, and the priest lose occult power and influence in consequence. - It is even a greater marvel that, night after night, we three are allowed to take our places at the head of the guest-hall in this priest’s house, and place our books—*the* Book and our hymn-books—upon the “ sacred table ” in front of the shrine, and from there sing a hymn of praise to God, then read a portion of Scripture and simply and plainly expound it, ending up with a strong appeal to all to give up the worship of idols and worship the true God. “ It is expedient for you that I go away,” said the Master. Yes, we can sing, and preach, and pray without fear or hindrance in the very face and presence of the enemy, because

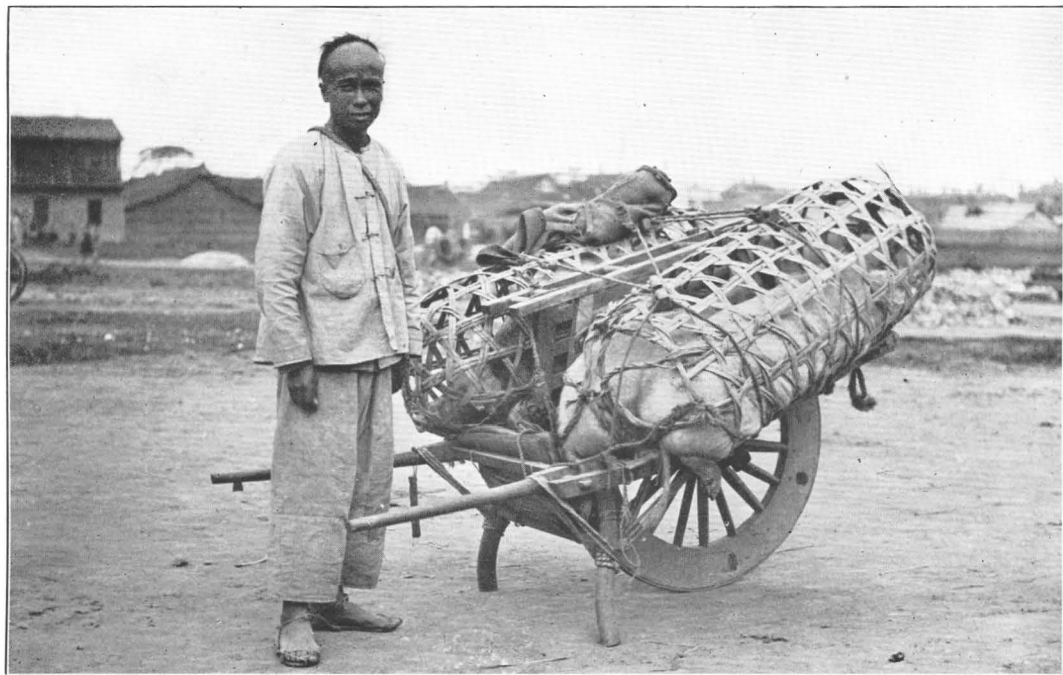
the Lord is on His Throne, keeping watch over His children. “There is a Man in the Glory . . . and He is there for us.”

Last night we gathered as usual for our nightly worship in front of this idol shrine—the only Christians present in this lonely little hamlet. We first sang our hymn of praise to God, and then read the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis; the words, “In the beginning, God . . .” were expounded, and those dark, heathen men listened respectfully while they heard for the first time of the Ever-living God, and a comparison was drawn between the One God, Self-existing and Everlasting, and the dumb, lifeless clay idols in the shrine behind us. Again and again one heard exclamations from those who were listening—“There is *law* in what she says,” “There is truth in it,” “The idols are only clay and wood.”

Later, some of these men stood with bowed heads and closed eyes while one of the Biblewomen led us in a simple, beautiful prayer, asking God to command the Light to shine into the hearts of all present, even as He commanded the Light to shine “in the Beginning.” It is on these occasions that faith reaches up and touches the Infinite; that we are conscious of the greatness of our commission, of our own *utter, utter* unworthiness—and also of the “mighty ordination of the Pierced Hand,” setting us apart to preach among the Gentiles the “unsearchable riches of Christ.”

To-day the sun is shining!

“The sun is shining with such a *clean* light to-day,” said the Biblewoman. She is quite right; it is the “clear shining after rain”; the sun has come forth



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Photo: McTavish & Co., Shanghai

in his strength, to shine upon a well-washed world, and Mother Nature has put on her very prettiest dress in his honour! She has arrayed herself in palest eau-de-nil, deepening to shades of velvety green and soft, warm browns, with trimmings of golden bronze, flaming scarlet, and touches of purest white.

The birds woke us up as they heralded the dawn. It is said that flowers yield up their very souls in the perfume they give forth. Surely the birds, also, yield up their little souls in their joyous carolling. When at home in the mission-house at Pine River City I have so often heard the song of the *hwa mei*, or “Chinese nightingale” (a species of thrush), in early spring. He seems to like perching in a tallow tree not far from the window of my room, and there mid-mornings he sings and trills to his heart’s delight. I have heard him both in the daytime and while it is still the faintest dawning of the day. I love to think that the true nightingale sings also at night, conquering his environment, and giving forth his best and sweetest in spite of the dangers that lurk in the shadows around. This morning one could not distinguish the sweet voice of the *hwa mei* amongst the others, because the bird choir were singing a kind of “Hallelujah Chorus,” but the refrain seemed to contain the words, “Carry on, carry on!” It is a soldier’s word—perhaps the birds were messengers from the Heavenly “G.H.Q.,” for the message came filled with the hope and encouragement of a victorious ending to the campaign.

“Thank God for the bitter and ceaseless strife,
And the sting of His chastening rod!
Thank God for the stress and the pain of life,
And oh! thank God, for God!”

CHAPTER X

THROUGH A MOUNTAIN PASS

OUR journey to-day led over a high mountain, up, and up, and up again ; then down until we reached this little village, cosily situated in a hollow between the hills. Once before on a cold winter's day I had crossed this same mountain on my way back from the city of Pucheng. On that occasion I could not enjoy the glorious beauty of the scenery because of the grumbling of the chair-coolies, who had never travelled on that road before. An unknown road always seems longer, and on that day, both for them and for me, it was interminable indeed. We were nearly at the close of the short day when we got as far as the top of the " pass " ; there was no village nor hamlet in sight, so we rested for a few moments on the crest of the next hill, fervently hoping that some other traveller would join us, and that we could be shown the way. It was such a still, cold evening ; the sun had set in a sea of molten amber ; there was no sign of life, and no sound whatever broke the stillness, except the gentle swish of the wind in the pines, and the faint " cheep, cheep " of a few little birdies in the distance, who had not yet gone to sleep. Twilight was falling rapidly as we went down the other side of the pass, the chair-bearers talking little to one another, and then only in whispers. I caught the word " tigers ! " " Are there tigers in this pass ? " I asked. " We don't know," they

answered, and we went on quietly into the growing darkness.

I wondered very much what would really happen if a tiger suddenly appeared on the hillside! Would the chair-bearers dump me down alone, and flee for their lives; would there be a "smile on the face of the tiger" in the morning? We lighted our lantern presently and plodded on again. Was I not thankful when, a few minutes later, we saw the tiny twinkling lights of our village at the foot of the pass!

It was so different to-day; every eerie feeling vanished in the glowing sunlight of the early spring morning. We rested on the top of the pass amidst a veritable riot of azaleas; the coolies picked large branches, until the front of my chair was just one blaze of scarlet. They also gathered some beautiful peach-coloured wild pomegranates. "They are not eatable," they said, "but you can play with them." Later on, some boys gave us branches of wild olives.

It would well repay one to go slower, and look for special floral treasures on these mountains, and maybe pry into some of Nature's secrets; yet, perhaps, while the exquisite veining of a leaf or rare plant was being examined, the millions of other beautiful things, the grandeur of the whole—even the message of the mountains—might be missed after all.

We arrived at our destination about midday, and although the lady of the house had no intimation of our arrival she came forward at once, greeting us with true courtesy and hospitality. The rest of the day was spent in a crowd, with never a moment's privacy until evening fell and all the men, women, and children had gone to their homes for supper.

We were shown upstairs to the loft, a clean and airy

place where the grain is stored. In a far corner, a tiny room, under the eaves, was placed at my disposal ; the Biblewomen, who have accompanied me, sleep in the larger apartment. It is the first visit of a foreigner to the village, so, naturally, curiosity is rife.

After supper, we had crowds examining my belongings and then listening to the gospel message at our evening service in the guest-hall.

To-day we have been able to preach a little in some of the houses, the people being very friendly and hospitable, and tea, and yet more tea, is the order of the day.

The women are mostly very tall, strong, and healthy-looking ; born and bred among the mountains, they have absorbed into their make-up something of the bigness and strength of the hills. In one house the host, a literary man, apparently well off, insisted on making fresh tea for us with his own hands, from his own particular store, in his own particular den, although his wife had already most hospitably entertained us.

Then on we went again to other houses, where the women gathered to hear for the first time the way of salvation ; presently an old man, who had been listening, said, “ Our country has no emperor now and no ruler ! ” Quickly the younger Biblewoman took his words up, and answered, “ No, and alas ! what is the consequence ? Fighting and quarrelling about nothing ; war between this faction and that faction ; the whole country overrun with thieves and robbers ; travelling unsafe ; who knows what a day may bring forth ? This condition of things,” she added, “ is because we have no emperor or proper ruler ; it is just the same with your souls. No one knows which idol is the strongest ; you are worshipping many

idols, and many lords, and yet have neither peace nor comfort in your hearts. Turn to the One Lord and Saviour of all men, then you will find peace and happiness for this life, and the life to come."

Neither is our host nor any member of his family a Christian, but they are all friendly to us and interested in the Christian doctrine. I hope it will not be long before their idols may be put away.

It is the best house in the village, and our host the most important person here. He is the head of the clan to which almost every family in the village belongs. He is a striking-looking old man, tall and dignified, with a courtly, old-world air ; in his younger days he was the village schoolmaster—a position held in highest honour. All local clan disputes and village quarrels are settled by him, with the exception of serious breaches of the peace, and lawsuits about property, which are taken before the district Mandarin at the city courts.

He is most attentive, and considerate and anxious for our comfort, always coming up to the loft when we return from work to see that our wants are supplied, when he is followed by a mob of inquisitive little boys and girls anxious to have another look at the foreigner ! Their beady black eyes grow larger as they look at me, and if a peep of what is passing in their minds could be obtained, I fear it would not be complimentary !

On one occasion when passing through villages where foreigners were seldom seen, my sedan-chair was set down in a busy street, while the chair-bearers disappeared to rest and eat opium. Immediately a small crowd gathered and peeped in ; they looked and looked, too astonished—too horrified, perhaps, to respond to my greeting. The Biblewomen with me administered

a gentle rebuke, saying, “Why are you looking so? Do you know it is rude to stare?” The answer came quickly—and from a young man too!—“Look at her! Why, if I look any longer, I shall have nightmare to-night!” Vanity is a weed that is certainly not well nourished in itinerating work!

Life, up here, in these scattered villages and hamlets, is very simple. Men and women pursue the “even tenor of their way,” busy in their fields and in their homes, the women seldom going beyond their own villages, with no recreation and no interests outside their own immediate environment. In the evenings they indulge their social instincts by gathering together in groups in guest-halls, or on the stone steps of their front doors, or they sit in the cool, public resting-places in the sheltered corners of the villages.

Their conversation consists in the retailing and exaggerating of the daily local events and happenings; tiger stories, fairy-tales, and the folk-lore of the past are passed from mouth to mouth. They know little (and care less!) about the tremendous problems that exercise the minds of the people who live in the great world beyond the mountains, yet the big things of life are the same everywhere—in these quiet, far-away hamlets and in the teeming, busy towns.

The monotony of daily life is quite frequently broken, and the minds and emotions of even the phlegmatic country people kept stirred, by the many emergencies and romances which occur in their midst. At one time we rented a small house in one of the larger villages in this district, hoping to establish a centre for work amongst the outlying hamlets and villages. The Biblewoman and myself were staying there for a short time.

One morning, while we were still at breakfast, we heard a great commotion in the street. Some of our kindly women neighbours knocked at the door and called out, "Come quickly, and see something not often seen!" The door was opened, and we joined them at once. All the townspeople seemed gathered in groups on their doorsteps, and were greatly excited. We asked, what was happening? They answered that a young girl had been arrested and was being escorted by soldiers to the District Court at "Pine River City."

Presently the miserable little procession came along. In front were two soldiers, dressed in khaki uniforms, blowing large brass trumpets with all their might, in order to attract the attention of the people. Next came two prisoners, bound firmly to the soldiers with their own belts; then the poor young girl, who was unbound, but closely surrounded by the soldiers, while more of the girl's relatives followed on behind.

When all had passed by, they told me the details of a most romantic story. The girl belonged to a small hamlet, not far away, where she lived with her parents. She was twenty-one years of age, and a nice-looking, bright girl. A few years ago, a family from the neighbouring province came to live in a house in the vicinity of this hamlet. There was a grown-up son who earned his living by herding ducks. Notwithstanding the strictness with which Chinese girls are brought up, and the watchful care with which they are surrounded, somehow the duck-herd and this young girl became friendly, and their friendship ripened into a mutual attachment. These two young people proved the truth of the old familiar adage, "The course of true love never did run smooth," for their brief and stolen interviews were discovered, and the wrath of the girl's

parents could not be appeased. The duck-herd allowed a little time to elapse before he ventured to ask for the girl in marriage. Then he sent a “match-maker” friend of his to the parents of the girl, with a form of proposal, and asked him to arrange with them the amount of money to be paid by him for the privilege of marrying their daughter. The “suit” was unsuccessful, the duck-herd was forbidden to come near the house, and even commanded to leave the neighbourhood.

In the meantime the parents had quietly betrothed the girl to a well-off shopkeeper in the next town, and the marriage was arranged to take place in a few months’ time. The girl was sent away on a visit to another village, and placed in the care of some relatives. The duck-herd, hearing of this and of her approaching marriage, hired a band of country “braves,” armed them with knives, staves, and old-fashioned farmers’ guns, and sent them to raid the house, and seize and carry off the girl by force. One evening, supper was over and cleared away, the front door shut and barred for the night, the family and their visitors were sitting together in the guest-hall, enjoying a chat before retiring to rest, when suddenly footsteps were heard outside, the front door was banged on, and burst open. Before the terrified inmates had recovered from the shock, the armed band had rushed in, seized the girl roughly, and carried her off. They took her out of the village to where there was a waiting sedan-chair, bundled her in, lifted the chair on to their shoulders, and bore her off, in the dark, to the duck-herd’s house, where she was kept hidden for about a month.

However, the betrothed husband was not going to

allow himself to be deprived so easily of his bride, and he got busy too, and, with his friends, went to the District Magistrate's *yamen* (court-house) and made complaint, giving all the information they had, and quite a lot besides. The result was that a posse of soldiers was sent to arrest all concerned in the transaction. The soldiers travelled secretly by night, the betrothed husband leading the way ; they reached the duck-herd's house by daylight, arrested the girl, the duck-herd's father, her own father, and any of the men found there ; marched them all to the *yamen*, and lodged them there until the case came up for trial. The duck-herd himself managed to elude the soldiers, and escaped to the next province. The young girl looked very dishevelled and ashamed, and as if she had been weeping for a week. I was glad to hear that the soldiers had ordered a sedan-chair to meet them, so the girl would be hidden a little bit from the public gaze, when passing through the streets to the *yamen*.

When the procession had passed by, we stood talking for a while, and I asked some of the young men on which side their sympathies were? I am almost ashamed to record the *very* unromantic reply: "Of *course* the duck-herd must be severely punished as an example to others, otherwise every one would be seizing and carrying off his wife instead of 'buying' her from her parents in the lawful Chinese way"!

We afterwards heard the end of the duck-man's story. When the case came on for trial, after much discussion, the Magistrate asked the girl the plain question, "To which of the two men do you wish to belong?" The meek and modest answer of the maiden was, "The man my father and mother have arranged for me to marry." So the story ends, I

hope, with the usual tag, “and they were happy ever afterwards,” though the poor duck-man was left lamenting!

Which reminds me of another wedding! It was still quite early morning on one of the first days of the New Year, when we heard a man's voice in our hall, calling at the very top of his loud voice, “You are invited to come and enjoy yourselves on the twelfth, and to eat the bride's feast on the thirteenth of the moon.” It was a very grubby old man, who held a position something like that of town-crier. In his hand was a large sheet of red paper (red being the festal colour) on which the names of all invited guests were written; he gave the invitation in a loud, pompous voice, and then walked away, without waiting for a reply, as who should say, “You will be sure to come; I have given you the invitation, have I not?”

When the wedding-day came, we sent our presents, nicely wrapped in red paper, and from early morning messengers from the bridegroom's house kept coming, at intervals, to call us to the wedding. We invariably answered, “Yes, we are coming, thank you,” but we knew the bride would not arrive at her new home until dusk, and that we were not really expected until then.

Just at dusk we reached the house. Things certainly seemed to be in rather a muddle—much noise, bustle, untidiness, tawdry decorations, red paper everywhere, pretty coloured lanterns, pigs squealing, hens cackling, cocks crowing, dogs barking, children both crying and laughing, grown-ups rushing hither and thither, much cooking, sizzling, and din! The large red tallow candles, in their tall pewter candle-

sticks already lighted, spluttered out a welcome. The family ancestral tablets were spread out, and an acetylene gas lamp (hired for the occasion), refusing to allow itself to be lighted, was, instead, adding its quota to the buzz of noise ! Every part of the guest-hall was filled with something or some one.

Suddenly our old friend the town crier called out, " The bride is coming ; the bride is coming ! "

Immediately the noise ceased, people and animals were scattered, the guest-hall was cleared, the bridegroom and his mother fled to a private room and hid, according to Chinese etiquette, and in a moment every one else was at the front door, ready and waiting to receive and welcome the bride.

She arrived in a gaudily painted sedan-chair, ornamented with tinsel and gilt fringe ; the cover of the chair was a mass of rainbow-tinted paper flowers. The chair was borne by four men, and was carried right into the guest-hall and dumped down in front of the " sacred " or " worship " table. Two dignified middle-aged men, friends of the bridegroom, who had escorted the bride from her own home, now helped her out of the chair and led her by the hands to her own room. She walked mincingly and unwillingly, in the modest manner expected of a bride, while our friend, the town-crier, looking grubbier than ever, went before, spreading a red blanket which did duty for a carpet, for the bride to walk on, so that she might enter her room for the first time with spotless feet.

The bride was gorgeously dressed in brilliant red silk embroidered in gold, with an extraordinary-looking head-dress or crown, made of silver-gilt filigree, profusely decorated with silver-gilt flowers and other ornaments. She also wore bracelets, anklets, and

chains galore, and her pockets were filled with cakes, sweets, and nuts, which were supposed to bring luck to the family she was entering, while later the children would gather round and pick her pockets !

Presently the friends of the bridegroom found him and brought him into the bride's presence ; he was dressed in a beautiful silk wedding suit, with the incongruous addition of an up-to-date new Trilby hat.

Then took place the rather pretty ceremony of "drinking wine together" for the first time ; the bride and bridegroom were placed sitting side by side, and two cups of wine handed to them ; the bridegroom first took a sip from his cup, then passed the cup to the bride ; she took a sip from her own cup, then passed hers to the bridegroom.

It is most probable that this is the first time the bride and bridegroom have really met, though they may have stolen a peep at one another before ! The next ceremony should have been the worship of Heaven and Earth, and of the bridegroom's ancestral tablets, but this was dispensed with, as the bridegroom is a Christian, though the bride is not. In the worship of Heaven and Earth, bride and bridegroom stand together in the guest-hall facing the weather-well, and with hands reverently clasped in front of them, *kow-tow* several times ; then turning round, they do the same to the ancestral tablets on the "sacred table." Instead of this, there was a short prayer service held, in which the bride was, rather unwillingly, persuaded to take part, and the blessing of God was invoked upon the new home life, then beginning.

When this was over, the bridegroom mingled freely

with his guests ; there was much good-natured banter and fun, and many were the compliments he received as to the beauty of the bride, such as " She is very pretty ; just like a peach ! " The bride remained quietly in her room, with some of the women guests, until the feast was announced, when she was escorted to the bride's special table and took her place in the seat of honour at the head, there being several tables arranged for the women in one room and for the men in the guest-hall.

On the second of the three days of festivities another pretty ceremony took place, the bride being escorted for the first time around her new home. According to custom, she donned a daintily embroidered apron, fastened round neck and waist with thick silver chains ; first she visited the kitchen, and went through the form of pretending to light a fire and cook a meal ; next she poured tea into tiny cups and handed it round to all the guests ; the guests, before handing back the empty cups to her, placing silver coins in them, as a present for the bride herself—a courtesy which was accompanied with much merry banter and pretty compliments.

A few days ago, our friend the town-crier called again, this time to invite us to a birthday feast. It was to celebrate the seventieth birthday of a well-known and most popular old lady. There were a thousand guests invited, and the feast was spread over many days and many houses, for the guest-halls of all the near neighbours were borrowed for the occasion !

There were one hundred round tables prepared, each table seating eight or ten guests. The house decorations were most handsome and elaborate ; in

the principal guest-hall, festoons of greenery hung from pillar to pillar, with gorgeous patches of red and gold paper flowers interspersed. Brilliant red satin draperies, embroidered in gold, were hung round the walls, with large red scrolls having birthday congratulations inscribed in gold letters, the words “Long Life and Happiness” being most conspicuous. The “sacred table” glittered with massive pewter candlesticks, holding red candles weighing twenty-five pounds each, which were kept constantly burning during all the days of the feast.

Further entertainment was provided by a theatrical company, who gave their services free, as their contribution to the happy occasion.

The most interesting item of the birthday feast, however, was when the old lady, in whose honour the feast was spread, sat at the head of the guest-hall in a chair of state, covered with bright red drapery and gilt embroidery, to receive the congratulations of her relatives and guests.

Each one went forward and knelt on the carpet of red blanket, placed on the floor in front of her, and offered their homage, then passed on to a side table, and received a bowl of steaming hot vermicelli, which was eaten as a kind of toast to the long life, happiness, and prosperity of the whole family, the “congratulation ceremony” being accompanied by the deafening noise of explosions of fire crackers and the more agreeable noise of a large band of local minstrels.

CHAPTER XI

THE FINING-POT

WE were coming back from village-visiting one very cold, frosty day. There was a biting northerly wind blowing and the two women who were with me were shivering through and through. It was already getting on towards dusk, but, passing a small iron foundry, we stopped for a moment to look in. The inside of the place felt so warm and cosy that we all went in, partly to see them at work, but also to get a good warm up. The ironmaster invited us to sit down and placed stools for us just beyond the circle of the sparks; he gave us hot, strong, well-stewed tea in rather grimy cups, which we drank.

The machinery was of the very simplest kind, all hand made, but they were turning out good work. There were just three things—a charcoal stove, rough lumps of iron, and a mould or pattern. They were making iron cooking-pots, of all sizes, but of only one shape, and the furnace-man was hard at work, keeping up the right heat.

The furnace itself was a most simple arrangement: it was a large clay oven, with a receptacle on top for the iron, and another for the charcoal fire underneath. There was a clay, tunnel-shaped bellows, attached, through which the furnace-man pushed a long pole backwards and forwards, in this way blowing the charcoal into a glowing mass of flame. The rough

pieces of iron were thrown into the receptacle, melted, and then poured into the cooking-pot mould—just enough to make one at a time ; presently out came a perfectly round-shaped cooking-pot. The pouring-out of the molten mass of liquid was the most wonderfully fascinating sight ; the bluish-white sparks flew in all directions, and were like a display of fireworks, or rather, as one of the women said, “ Like stars changing their thrones,” referring to the Chinese description and explanation of “ shooting stars ” !

A man came into the foundry carrying a load of broken, rusty, useless pieces of old cooking-pots. “ What are you going to do with those broken bits ? ” he was asked. “ Melt them down into a new one,” he answered, and while we were looking on, those broken, useless bits of iron were placed in the furnace, and presently, when melted and poured out, a good, useful cooking-pot was the result. It set one thinking !

We waited to see one more pot made, but it was a failure—there was a large flaw in the side ; being unsaleable and unusable, it was placed aside by itself in the corner, the ironmaster merely remarking in an aside, “ No use ; must pass through the fire again.” It had been marred in the making. I felt so sorry for that cooking-pot ; it seemed a living thing, and one wondered if it felt ashamed of being put aside as unusable. We learned many lessons in the cooking-pot foundry that cold afternoon, some of which were woven into the warp and woof of a little address at the next Sunday Christian Endeavour Meeting. The ironmaster himself was present, and seemed much interested in hearing about his own foundry. A few days afterwards he sent us a present of a large basket of charcoal for our fire-baskets.



A TYPICAL OLD TRAVELLER—SMOKING BY THE WAYSIDE

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I ~~think~~^{think}, perhaps, the chief lesson learned in the cooking-pot foundry was the possibility of broken lives being made wholly new when passed through the fire and moulded by the Love of God ; God *does* give back the years that the cankerworms have eaten.

I ~~think~~^{think} Ching-ho is about the dirtiest little town in all heathendom !

The main object in the building of the town seems to have been to find a spot large enough on which to build ; for the houses are flung together on the banks of the river, without any regard for symmetry, picturesqueness, or architecture, and are enclosed on both sides by steep, high mountains.

The streets are narrow, gloomy, and with the very dirtiest of pavements under foot, so slippery on wet days that one walks them almost at the peril of one's life ! On each side of the streets there are deep drains, not apparently for the draining of the town, but as receptacles for the offscouring of the houses, each householder only going so far as the drain in front of his house with the household rubbish ; neither the drains nor the streets are ever cleaned, and they are insanitary in the extreme.

The houses are so close together that few have gardens at the back, or even back doors, and most of them open into one another.

The people are like the town, untidy in dress, habits, and character ; and their houses are the same, though, of course, there are exceptions ; still, it is often quite impossible to distinguish between rich and poor in appearance.

At one time, when the new Southern Mandarin arrived and took over the rule and government of town

and countryside, one of the first bits of reform begun by him (but, alas ! not continued) was the cleaning up of the town. He ordered that no pigs were to be allowed to wander on the streets, but the drains and streets were left uncleansed and unswept.

One of the women said, "For three days we were terrified lest our pigs should wander in the streets, and we should be obliged to pay a heavy fine."

"After three days what happened?"

"Nothing more happened after three days," she answered. "We were allowed to let them wander at will again, and nobody interfered."

An attempt to put a stop to gambling is also going on at present, and some gamblers are being arrested and fined. One morning the catechist's wife called me to "come quickly, to see something interesting." It was a procession of soldiers; they had seized four gamblers and were parading them through the streets of the town for punishment, and as a warning to others. There were three men and one solitary young woman.

White flags, on which their accusations were written, were fastened to their backs, and the soldiers were blowing trumpets loudly, to attract everybody's attention. The four victims of the reform walked with their heads bowed, looking very much ashamed of themselves, but the gambling still goes on.

There are also spasmodic attempts to carry on an anti-opium-smoking campaign, and now and then an unfortunate victim is arrested and punished.

One morning one of the Christian women came to the church where we were staying. She was in great trouble, for her husband had just been arrested; the soldiers found him in an opium den, which was sufficient proof for them. "He is bound with ropes,

and in prison," his wife said, "and will die if not released, for he is weak and ill."

It is a very sad case, for her husband is an old man ; he had contracted the opium-smoking habit some years ago, when he was very ill, and has never been strong enough to give it up since ; both the habit and the craving have increased, and now he is an opium wreck. The only help that could be given was prayer help, and that was given freely and gladly. The next day one of the church members, who knew some of the soldiers at the prison, used his influence with them, and the old man was released. At a prayer-meeting held the same afternoon, the church-mother very humbly and gratefully thanked the Lord for the release of her husband, and pleaded earnestly for grace and strength for him to give up opium-smoking, and become a servant of God.

At the same prayer-meeting another Christian woman voiced her heartfelt thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father for the protection of her young son, who earlier in the day had been out fishing, and had suddenly fallen off the raft into the river. Being unable to swim, he was in great danger of drowning, but happily the current carried him shorewards instead of downstream, and a man drawing water at the river-bank waded out and rescued him ; so we had rather a wonderful little meeting.

Most of those in the church here have waded through seas of trouble into the Kingdom of God. Suffering, alone, has not softened their hearts. "Fire hardens clay," said the ironmaster ; and erring human hearts made of the clay of the earth would only harden in the furnace of affliction were it not for the warm love of God. He draws near to them in trouble, makes them

discontented with their own impotence, enables them to realise that “the waters of this world have failed, and they are thirsty still,” and thus they are more ready to listen and receive the things that belong unto their peace.

The Biblewomen visited a village for an afternoon’s preaching. It was raining, so they sheltered for a while with others in a rest-house on the way, waiting for the downpour to cease. Amongst them there was a delicate, poor-looking man, who listened intently while the Biblewomen redeemed the time by preaching to those present. He was much interested in what they said, asked questions, and said he would like to worship God. He told them of his home troubles—sickness and poverty, every member of his family being weak and ailing; he told them of all the money he had spent on medicine and idolatrous rites; of the money he had borrowed from the neighbours when his own was spent, and of how, when things were at their worst, he had sold his little farm to provide money for idolatrous rites; now they had nothing left and were obliged to keep a hot-potato stall, and earn a little money in that way.

“If only I had known about this doctrine before, I need not have spent my money for nothing,” he said regretfully. Then, in answer to his question as to how to begin to worship God, the women taught him to pray for forgiveness of sin, and for healing and strength for himself and his family.

He went back joyfully to his home with the good news in his heart and on his lips, the result being, that his family agreed, as a household, to worship the true God.

The following Sunday they all came to church for

the first time—the man's brother being so weak that he had to stumble along with the help of a stick. God has been so gracious to them, answering their stammering prayers; this brother is now better and able to work again, while the rest of the family are somewhat improved in health, and are more hopeful and happy.

One Saturday night, all the potatoes prepared for sale at the little stall during the day had not been sold; the man was very sad about it, and said to the evangelist, "It cannot be helped, I *must* sell them to-morrow, for they will be spoilt by Monday."

The evangelist persuaded him to trust in God and let them be spoilt rather than break the Sabbath, adding, "God won't let you lose; you will sell double the quantity on Monday." He then agreed to keep the Sabbath and trust God. It was a great test of his faith, for *all* his little living was on that stall.

Monday came; he had only prepared the usual quantity, but he sold all of it during the morning hours, and for the rest of the day had nothing to do but praise the Lord! "Truly God does protect," he said again and again. "I told you to prepare a double quantity," said the evangelist; "why did you not believe?"

We visited him one day because we heard his wife was ill again; it was a pathetic little home. They showed us the empty stalls where they once kept their buffaloes. "All dead," his wife said; "they all had plague and died."

"Do you keep pigs for selling?" we asked.

"We did once, but have none now. *Everything* went to buy medicines in sickness." Yet she insisted on

cooking some vermicelli and eggs for us, and if we had not partaken of it would have been so hurt!

Presently her husband said, "Will you do a little worship with us before you go, Sister?" Then we all gathered in the guest-hall, the little seven-year-old daughter being the only one in the family who knew the hymn we sang. The father cannot read, but he told us his little daughter was teaching him the Lord's Prayer; she comes to Sunday school, and what she learns there she passes on to him at home, so that it is a fulfilling of the promise, "A little child shall lead them." She is a dear little, bright-faced, delicate child.

We sang a hymn and then the Biblewoman led in prayer, not only for the household, but for all the villagers, many of whom were standing by, listening.

There is another woman here just beginning to worship. She, too, has come out of tribulation. Her only son, the hope of her life, died this summer. It had been a long illness—fever of some kind—which none of their herb medicines could heal. She mourned for her boy, day after day, as one who could not be comforted.

One day she was visiting friends in another house, fretting and grieving as usual, when a Christian woman happened to call. She listened to this poor woman's story, and her loving sympathy was drawn out in helpful, comforting words; she told the sorrowing mother of her own troubled life before she became a Christian, and then of the Christian's hope of the Resurrection, pointing her to the Lord Jesus for comfort and hope. Simply, almost crudely, she told one or two of the Bible stories she had heard—she, herself, being as yet only a babe in the knowledge of

the truth—but with such spiritual power that the poor sad woman went back to her home comforted and with her mind made up to worship God.

The same evening she told her husband of the wonderful truths she had heard, and asked him to allow her to worship God. He agreed, saying, "You may worship what you like ; I won't prevent you." The following day was Sunday ; her husband went out after breakfast to his daily work, and was not expected home again till dinner-time, so the woman dressed herself in her best clothes, locked up her house, and with her little daughter-in-law (a girl of fourteen years of age) came to church.

In the meantime, her husband, while at his work, had a bad fit of ague. He returned home unexpectedly early, and found the door of his rooms locked, so had to sit in the cold guest-hall until his wife's return from church. He was very angry, and scolded her, saying, "I have neither a house nor the inside of a house !"—the Chinaman's way of saying, "I have neither home nor wife !" She answered him quite gently, saying, "Don't be angry with me for going to church, because you gave me leave to go ; this is only a little test come when I am just beginning ; you must be patient with me." Her husband listened silently ; he scolded no more on that occasion, and was quite well again in a few days.

This woman's sister-in-law and family lived in the same house ; her son, a boy of twelve years of age, was ill at the time, suffering probably from malaria. When his mother heard the good news that God could save and protect them, she also determined to worship, and both women, the following Sunday, half carried, half led, the sick boy to church, so that he, too,

might worship God and ask for healing. God so graciously and wonderfully met their need, and heard their heart's cry for help, that each day the boy grew better and stronger, and when we visited them a few days ago he was quite well, and engaged in cutting wood to "keep the home fires burning."

We have been holding a fortnight's class for these beginners, but over that class might be written the words, "many adversaries." It was truly a bit of hard labour. We had invited four of the women to be our guests, as their homes were farther away than the others. We gave them a room under our little loft; the remainder lived near enough to be day pupils.

To begin with, each one of the four became ill in turn, so that night was turned into day with coughs, wheezes, groans, and sneezes underneath us.

"Why do you groan like that?" I asked. "Have you a pain anywhere?"

"No; but I am not comfortable," was the answer. She was quite a young girl; the next morning when her husband came to see her he was told about her groanings.

"Don't mind her," he said. "She always groans when there is very little the matter." So we were comforted about *her*.

One of the others became *really* ill, having a bad influenza cold, with fever, and to our great grief she had to go home; she was one of the very newest beginners, and we were so sorry she missed the teaching.

The other two, also, had influenza colds, and one of them an attack of asthma; she, too, left us for a few days, but was so eager to learn, that she came back again, though neither cough nor asthma were

better. She seemed afraid of our foreign medicine, and announced that she was always worse after a dose, so continued her own herb tea.

They were all very delightful to teach—eager, interested, and keen; our prayer times were often seasons of real meeting with God. We had numerous other disturbances and hindrances, often in the middle of a most solemn lesson, and one realised, again and again, that many of them were direct onslaughts from the great adversary of souls; but we trusted in our Emmanuel God. He did not fail us, and the class was brought, at the end of a fortnight, to a fairly successful conclusion.

One morning, during class, a woman brought us the news that a poor soldier was to be executed by shooting at noon-time; he was one of many convicted of rioting and looting. The execution took place on the hillside close to the town, only a few hundred feet away. I am sorry to say that most of my class, when free at noon-time, went to see the execution. "Shem's gentle daughters" do not shrink from horrors; and though one cannot accuse them of being really cruel, yet I have seen quite gentle-looking women and girls draw near to look at an animal being killed, and in the case of this poor soldier, they had to be stopped describing the horrible details on their return, and for the rest of the day their minds were much distracted from their lessons.

Another morning a woman came very late to class; she looked both angry and sad, and was weeping; she told us her adopted son was causing the family much anxiety. He was only one month married to this woman's daughter-in-law, and already objected to doing the household duties expected of him. His

mother said that before the agreement between them was written he was as "good as gold," most obedient and filial, but once it was signed he changed and became the very opposite; he also objected to his little fourteen-year-old wife coming to worship.

Yesterday, this same young hopeful had occasion to come to the church to ask his mother a question; we received him in a specially friendly manner, and invited him to sit and listen to the teaching. This, and seeing his wife and mother, with others, seated round the large table, all with books in front of them, quietly reading, seems to have made a great impression on him, for he made absolutely no objection to their coming again to-day. Another day, one of the women, on being asked why she was not learning as well as usual, replied, "Yesterday when I went home I told my husband what you had taught me."

"What did he say to it?"

"My heart is very troubled," was the answer, "for he scolded me greatly, saying, 'Very well, if God can protect you, look to Him for rice, for you shall not eat mine after this month is over; next year you can fend for yourself.'"

"You must be very patient with him," said the Biblewoman; "talk to him kindly and nicely; slowly, slowly he will change and allow you to come without scolding and abuse." Then she gave a beautiful illustration of just such another case, where patience, tact, good temper, and prayer won the day. In a town in our county there lives the dearest little fat roly-poly of a woman, whom we all love. When she first began to worship God, her husband was very angry and forbade her coming to church; she insisted on her right to become a Christian, and always

said "grace" aloud, for the whole family, before meals.

One day, as they sat at table, her head bowed in prayer and thanksgiving to God as usual (Chinese grace being always a fairly long prayer), her husband snatched away her bowl of rice from before her face, saying, "Now, as you thank God for your rice, you can look to Him for it; I will give you no more." When her prayer was finished, she lifted up her head; the bowl of rice was gone! She only smiled at her husband and spoke brightly to him, then boldly walked to the rice-tub, ladled out for herself another bowl of hot rice, and calmly ate it before him! He said no more, and since that day has allowed her to worship, and now even he sometimes comes to church. "You must let your good deeds and good temper conquer the evil in your home," said the Biblewoman, "and they *will* conquer."

Still, the victory has not yet been gained, in the other instance, for the next day when the other woman's husband came home earlier than usual, found the door locked again, and could not get into his room, instead of coming a few steps farther to the church to get the key from his wife, he kicked the door into two halves in his anger, and his wife is now too terrified to come any more, and we have not seen her since. Prayer—earnest, persistent, prevailing prayer—in the Victor's Name is the only way of helping these tempted, struggling beginners.

Another interruption came one day when one of our pupils arrived late and in such an excited state that the lesson had to be stopped and her story attended to. The brother had been press-ganged by the soldiers, as he was returning from the mountains with a load of

wood. He was suddenly seized, and compelled to accompany the soldiers to the barracks, where he was locked up. He somehow managed to escape, and foolishly fled back to his home, where the soldiers found him again. They had now him tied up to a tree, where he was awaiting punishment.

“Will you get him set free?” she said. “You foreigners have influence with the authorities.” It is very difficult to refuse such pathetic appeals for help and influence, especially as the Chinese cannot understand why we must not interfere in politics or in the business of the magistrates. She left us feeling terribly disappointed, but sought help elsewhere, and her brother was eventually set free.

The “Beginners’ Class” is now over and the women scattered to their homes; we believe that most of them have made up their minds to worship, but, as I said before, there are “many adversaries.”

The thoughts suggested by the cooking-pot foundry remain in one’s memory, and one’s hope increases that these women and many others as yet untouched, who are living useless, sinful lives, will in the near future become illuminated, regenerated, and moulded according to the pattern, by the melting, drawing power of Almighty Love, in answer to the believing prayer of God’s children.

CHAPTER XII

THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION

EVENING prayers are over, and we are enjoying a sociable time together in the guest-hall, before retiring to rest.

The men of the family are seated on the one side and the women on the other, as is demanded by demure Mrs. Grundy of China ; nevertheless, we are all freely and happily conversing together, telling thrilling stories, and eating bowls of hot chestnuts, which one of the daughters-in-law has cooked for us. This is that delightful hour when racial barriers are not so much broken down and forgotten as non-existing. "Compound walls" no longer separate us ; heart touches heart in closest sympathy and kinship ; we feel we are "all one in Christ Jesus," and in a very real way "bound together in the bundle of life with the Lord our God."

It is a small country farmhouse, too small even to spare a room for our accommodation, so every evening, when prayers are over, we stay for a friendly chat, and are afterwards escorted to our lodgings in the loft of a neighbour's house. This is a truly Christian family ; my host took the name of "Light Spreader" at his baptism, and he has, all his short Christian life, lived up to it (he is only a five-year-old Christian), spreading and radiating the Gospel Light in his own hamlet, and all around his district. He has three grown-up sons,

two daughters-in-law, and one baby grandson. They are a most happy little family, united to one another in real love. The only “rift within the lute” is the very tiniest one—merely the fact that the second son is as yet unmarried, and his parents are finding it difficult to get him a suitable wife!

The mother told me that early this year, when her youngest son was married, this young man was very jealous, and sadly reproached his parents for their lack of duty in not providing him with a wife too! He said to them, “You have arranged for both my eldest brother and my youngest brother, but not for me!”

“What am I to do?” she said to me. “He is so ugly, no pretty smart girl will be willing to marry him, and yet he will not have any other!”

It is the duty of Chinese parents to provide wives for their sons, but this man is truly unprepossessing in appearance, undersized, rather ugly, and lacking in ordinary intelligence, and he insists on marrying a pretty girl; what *can* his parents do!

The family were very poor before they became Christians—so poor that the parents were unable to buy wives for their sons, and as all wives must be bought and paid for in China, even the eldest was then unprovided for. When the father preached the gospel to his heathen neighbours and friends, they answered him, “If God prospers you enough to provide two wives for your two sons within the year, then we will believe there is something in Christianity.” God, in His marvellous grace, heard that heathen challenge, and so blessed and prospered their little farm that *within the year* two bright young daughters-in-law were added to the home. This year a little grandson

was born, so the old parents' cup of blessing is filled to overflowing. "When I look at those two young women there," said the head of the family, "I cannot *not* believe in God; *they* are the proof that He has heard my prayers and bestowed this grace on my household."

To-night our conversation was about witnessing for God. The head of the house told us what had happened during the long drought last summer, when the rice harvest was in danger of being lost through lack of rain. There is a large, busy market close by this hamlet; the elders collected money from the people in the district and arranged a succession of enormous idol processions. They carried the special idol called the "Five Grain Spirit" round the fields, accompanied by crowds of people with banners, trumpets, drums, cymbals, and all kinds of other noises!

This is the farmers' idol, and *their* Lord of the harvest; it is worshipped and invoked for rain and shine, and for fruitful seasons.

A large party of idolaters came to my host's household for a contribution of money towards the expenses of these processions; the money was refused. The idolaters became very angry, and used threatening language, but all to no purpose; my host remained absolutely unmoved. "You also eat the rice provided by the 'Five Grain Spirit,' why won't you contribute your share of money for the processions?" they asked. "Neither you nor I eat rice provided by the idols," was the reply; "we *all* eat the rice so graciously given to us by the One True and Living God, who loves all men and nourishes and provides for all alike." They were very angry at this answer and threatened dire penalties if he persisted in refusing to contribute.

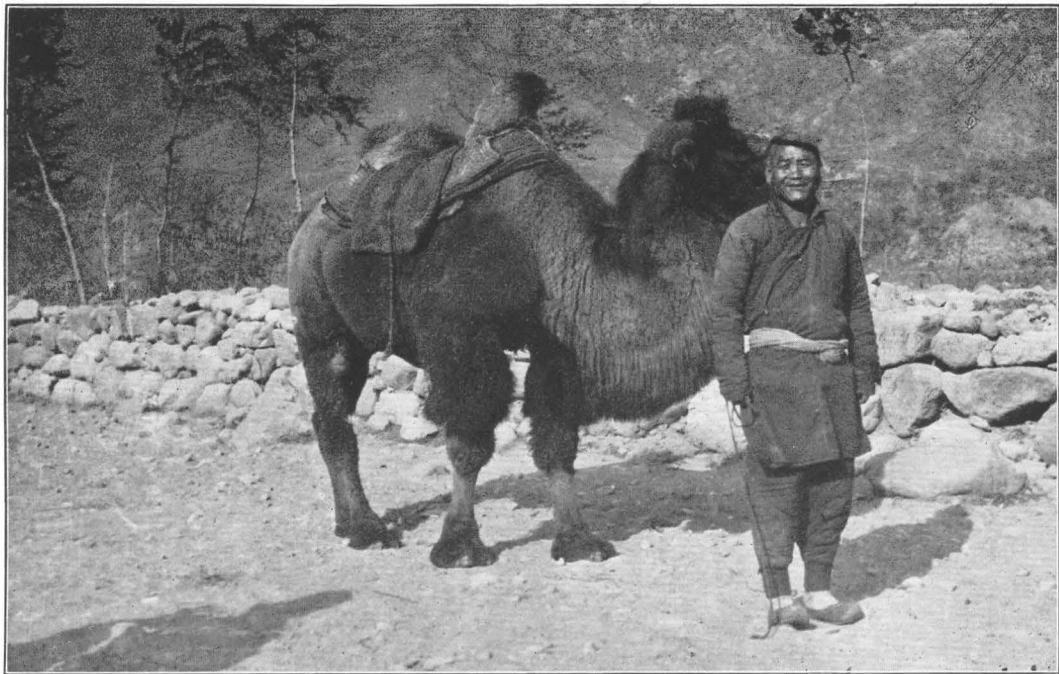
“ You may cut my head off and kill me, but I and my household are all Christians, and will never give one cash for the upkeep of any kind of idolatry,” was the firm reply. Then the heathen deputation left.

Some days later, the catechist from the central church at Pine River City came to spend a day and night with the family ; they all gathered together for a prayer-meeting, and there, in the guest-hall, they committed their case to the One who is always a very present help in time of trouble, pleading earnestly for the refreshing rain to fall and swell the grain. After the prayer-meeting was over, to their exceeding great joy, the badly needed rain fell and the drought was broken.

The heathen gave thanks to *their* idol, but the Christians knew their cry of need had reached the Throne, and had set in motion all the power of heaven on their behalf, so they thanked God and took courage. It was a brave and noble stand for them to take, especially as they are the only Christian family in that district.

The Biblewoman then told us of another brave stand against idolatry, taken by an elderly woman, in a village a good distance away from the central church. In this case, too, it was made by the only worshipper of God there—a widow with two sons, and a tiny home and farm.

Over a year ago, during an extremely wet season, an idol procession was planned in which all the farmers shared. The Five Grain Spirit idol was to be paraded round the fields to drive away the worms which were attacking the roots and spoiling the ripening grain. The village elders came to this Christian widow's



MEDICINE-VENDOR'S CAMEL

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house and requested her son to help to carry round the wooden idol's sedan-chair. "Never," she cried. "My son will not help to carry round your wooden idol. More than that, I won't allow the procession to come near my fields, or drive away the worms from there! I am trusting in God to protect my fields and my harvest." "And," added the Biblewoman, "her harvest was excellent that year!"

The Chinese Christians are not perfect by any means; they have many failings and shortcomings. Teaching them and living our lives so closely intertwined with theirs, we see and grieve over their weaknesses; and we are constantly coming into contact with minds accustomed to a lower and, also, a different standard of morality to ours, but we remember that the Lord Jesus will one day present us all to Himself, without spot or wrinkle or flaw; so we go on our way, rejoicing in all the good that we see, and in their great faith—a faith so strong and victorious that in the light of it sins, weaknesses, and shortcomings fade away and are forgotten.

The last time we visited here, the idols still occupied the place of honour on the sacred shelf at the top of the guest-hall, because the Christians only owned half the house. Now we are glad to see the "sacred shelf" is cleared, dusted, and is being used as a bookshelf for the Family Bibles and hymn-books; it is further ornamented with two vases filled with freshly gathered wild lilies, and the Ten Commandments, inscribed on a large scroll, occupy the place of honour on the wall just above it. The idols have been dethroned and destroyed, and the other family, consisting of an elderly husband and wife, are beginning to worship God too. The man is deaf and stupid and understands

very little, but the woman is keen and bright, and already joins intelligently in family prayers.

Yesterday, she proposed an expedition to a hamlet a few miles away, where her own relations and friends live; she wished them also to hear the gospel message.

After an early dinner, we started, accompanied by the other "church-mother" and herself. The walk was so pretty, all along a riverside path, until we came to an orchard of oil trees, laden with fruit; and there, hidden away in the trees, nestled the picturesque little hamlet. We entered the very first house, but the inmates were not too polite or friendly; they invited us to sit and rest, but no tea was served—a lack of courtesy which our old lady could not forgive. Later, when we left the village, she indignantly exclaimed, "Those women's manners are exceedingly lacking; not even a cup of *cold* tea did they offer us after our hot walk!" However, we were able to give them some explanation of why we had visited them, and a few words of exhortation too.

We had a very good time in the next house with a party of young women; one bright and rather pretty girl was an eager and intelligent listener. The others were more stupid and dense, but that girl listened carefully to every sentence and then explained it over again to the others.

She seemed very near the Kingdom, and one's whole heart went forth in an intense desire for her salvation. Suddenly she rose from her seat, took up her work-basket, and continued her sewing. To my great disappointment the opportunity was over, for when I asked her would she worship God and accept the Saviour, she answered coldly, "I have no time now;

when I am old I will think about it," and we had to leave.

There are so many like her, almost, but not quite persuaded, unconvicted of sin and not at all convinced of any personal need, yet they have some vague feeling that the message is true and that they will some day need and believe it. We are glad even of that much result of a first hearing.

We walked slowly home in the twilight, enjoying the cool air and the shadows cast by the mountains and rocks on the water. One old lady was troubled about ancestral worship, her mind not being quite prepared to break with it completely. She has only a glimmer of truth as yet ; but there *is* a glimmer, which is slowly growing brighter and stronger. I was surprised at the clear grasp of some of the simple gospel facts she has already acquired, and at her eagerness in telling them to others. May the Blessed Spirit of Life fan the glimmer into a glowing flame of love for God and for others, so that she may be a witness wise enough to win souls.

Her theory about ancestral worship is that if the spirits of the dead are not worshipped and food offered to them, they have power to harm the living descendants. "They come back for food," she said, "and if they are not supplied, they will take our children's lives instead."

"If our ancestors are *that* wicked," answered the Biblewoman, "it is better to have nothing to do with them, and when they find they get no food they won't come back again."

"I am not afraid of worshippers of God coming back for food ; *they* are content, but our heathen ancestors certainly do," she replied.

Heathen superstitions and habits of thought are not easily uprooted, but there is always the unfailing resource—"If ye ask . . . I will do."

The other old "church-mother" is delightfully freed from all faith in idolatry and ancestor-worship; she is a true, humble servant of God, and gave her testimony yesterday afternoon to the goodness and power of God in a simple, telling way. She is a rough diamond, illiterate and unrefined in manners, but somewhere in her make-up there is a love of the beautiful, for seldom have I seen her house without a bunch of wild flowers ornamenting the untidy kitchen or untidier guest-hall, while frequently a sweet fresh flower from the hillside decorates her own smoothly dressed hair, which, when worn with a faded, well-patched, but always clean dress, has a not incongruous effect.

A little while ago, a three days' convention for women Church members was held in the Women's School at Pine River City. The convention speaker was the Chinese Archdeacon of Fukien, and most of these countrywomen attended. The Archdeacon, in his preaching, used some very simple and telling illustrations, one of which seemed specially to grip some of the older women who cannot read and are really too old to learn. Speaking of the Word of God, he said it was like a large cupboard filled with stores of good and nourishing food for our souls' nourishment; "but," he added, "it is locked up; if we cannot read, if we do not open the cupboard and get that food out, our souls will starve; we cannot grow strong in faith, grace, or knowledge unless we read God's Holy Word—we must all get keys made to fit the lock of the cupboard."

"We must get keys made to fit the lock," said one

of these church-mothers afterwards ; " none of us can read, and I fear the souls of all my family will starve to death unless we get the cupboard opened ; so I will send two of my daughters-in-law to your school to learn to read "—and so she did !

Another church-mother, who was also very grieved because she had no key to fit the lock, was comforted by the suggestion that perhaps memorising and storing up all she heard in her heart was the key. " Thine age shall be clearer than the noonday," is the thought that comes to my mind as I write of these old people, who, long past middle age, have " turned from idols to serve the Living God." How we praise God for every one of them, realising that their salvation is a miracle of God's grace alone. The hard ground has been broken up in their hearts, bit by bit, and clod by clod ; the walls of prejudice, the darkness of ages of heathenism concentrated in every single soul, have been moved and dispersed ; walls of ignorance, superstition, sin, and self-righteousness have been penetrated by the dynamic of God's Holy Spirit, and the slaves set free to worship God in sincerity and truth.

The children are the hope of the future Church and of the nation. What a great work it is to win their young lives for the Lord, to gather them into schools for teaching and training in life and character, despite the fact that it is the staid, grown-up, matured men and women who are the mainstay and hope of the Church of the present day.

To-day, as I was leaving the house, I met a Christian woman who was on her way home from the weekly prayer-meeting. She, too, is elderly, one of those who, in middle age, has come to know the Lord Jesus as her Saviour. Her face shone with that " Light not seen

on land or sea,” and I was struck with the chastened beauty of her expression.

During the last week both sickness and other troubles have come upon her household, driving her to seek the Face of God in earnest intercession, and once again she has proved the love and faithfulness of the Heavenly Father in answering her believing prayer. She is one of the many who, through much tribulation, have entered into the Kingdom of God.

I have refrained from giving details of the younger Christian men and women, who are still bearing the burden and heat of the day. They are still in the midst of the fight, winning many a victory; alas! also, suffering many a defeat. They are, thank God, ever struggling onward and upward, but the end of the journey, for them, is not yet, and they need all the prayer-power we can focus on them, as they press the battle to the gate. I love to think of the more matured and mellowed men and women who, in the evening of life, have been delivered from the thralldom of the Evil One, and are already almost in sight of the Gates of Pearl:

“Holy Saviour, calm their fears,
When earth's brightness disappears;
Grant them, in their latter years,
Light at evening time.”

CHAPTER XIII

CHRYSANTHEMUMS AND CHURCHES

“**L**ORD, we pray Thee that Thou wilt open our eyes to behold the heaven that lies about us, wherein they walk, who, being born to the new life, serve Thee with the clearer vision and the greater joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

It is all so beautifully, wonderfully true! The blue *is* bluer, the green takes on a greener sheen, the stones *do* preach sermons, and every common bush is aflame with God, when the eyes of our “inside hearts” are opened to see!

We had been away in the country itinerating for a fortnight, spending part of the time in the most sordid surroundings, and had just come back again to our own clean, bright mission-house and compound. The garden was looking specially charming, for the chrysanthemums were in their full bloom and beauty. Pine River City has the name of being good soil for flowers, though not for fruit.

It is a local theory that if a place produces good flowers it cannot be expected to produce good fruit as well. This certainly seems to be true of our little city, for fruit is scarce, while our garden yields a plethora of flowers; the roses in spring and autumn growing in such luxuriance that we gather them not only in single blooms, but in large branches. They are the greatest joy to us, and contribute their quota of

pleasure and beauty to our whole compound as well as to many of our Christian and non-Christian Chinese friends.

We have sometimes taken the opportunity, when the roses were at their best, to invite some of the upper-class women to an "At Home," the garden, of course, being the attraction for them, though the aim of the gatherings has always been the preaching of the gospel and the salvation of souls.

A country boy carried my itinerating load back for me, as he wished to visit his mother in our Women's School, and incidentally to earn a little money at the same time. The boy's family are "beginning" Christians, living in a small village, close to a market town, where there is already a flourishing church established.

A load includes clothes, books, medicines, bed, food, etc., for use on trips to the country; it is packed into two large, rather high, baskets with covers, and swung on a pole across the shoulders. This boy stayed with us for a couple of days, as the guest of the cook's family. It was his first time of seeing the inside of a foreigner's house with a drawing-room, the furniture of which consists mainly of artistically arranged chairs, pot-plants, flowers, and plenty of sunshine! The boy walked round the rooms and verandah, examining everything in a kind of dazed way; then the garden attracted his attention, where he seemed fascinated with the flowers. He made few remarks, but I feel sure he thought our house and garden a kind of ante-chamber of heaven!

On the morning of his return to his own dirty, sordid little home, my colleague took him into the garden again, gathered a large bunch of the finest and most

beautiful blooms there, and presented them to him. He was hugely delighted, and it was quite touching when he dived down into his bag (a cloth receptacle carried on a pole) and shyly brought to light a pair of pretty new vases, which he had just bought in the hope of being able to take some flowers back to his house. With many good wishes from all, and exhortations from his mother to take care of his father and to be filial and obedient, he went happily on his homeward way.

This boy had got a little vision of the beautiful, and was taking a wee bit of it back with him to make his own surroundings more like home.

There was a women's prayer-meeting the same afternoon in the school, and the boy's mother prayed earnestly that the bunch of chrysanthemums carried home by her son might be a witness for God to the neighbours around and make them also begin to think of Him.

I once asked a Christian woman what had really turned her thoughts heavenwards and made her think of worshipping God. "It was my first visit to your house," she said, "it was so clean and bright with flowers; I kept thinking about it for days afterwards, and at last came to the conclusion that if the foreigner's house was so clean and pretty, the foreigner's God must be good and holy, too;" and from that day she became a shining light and a true witness for God, both in her own home and in the district.

It is lovely to know that our houses, with all their prettiness of pictures, furniture, and fittings may be used of God, and that our gardens, with their wealth of flowers and beauty thrown open wide, shared with those who have none, and dedicated to the Lord

Jesus, may become, in a very real way, “gardens of the Lord,” and that “the Voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” may be heard by those who have ears to hear; weary hearts may be rested, sad hearts comforted, and tired eyes refreshed and enlightened by the beauty and fragrance of the flowers in our gardens. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”—I wonder how much it is intended we should read into the words “my house”?

The rearing of our youngest “baby” church has been a troublesome work; to begin with, the “babe” was born a weakling with a tendency to rickets; she is still weak and unstable, needing more care and nourishment than we are able to give, with our present shortage of workers; yet she has made a good fight for life, and there is *some* growth. We are leaning hard on the Lord Jesus for these “babes” out here, and trust that the prayers of God’s children in the homelands also, voicing the deep heart needs of these erring “other sheep,” will reach the ears of Almighty Love; and that our God, whose Name is “Wonderful,” “the Mighty God,” will answer fully and freely. There are eight or nine women coming regularly to church; five of these have entered the catechumenate, but none, as yet, are ready for Baptism.

There was one other young girl who we had hoped would have wished to enter, but she refused, saying, “My lamp has not enough oil.” She had “run well” for a time, but was hindered through the sudden death of her baby girl, just when she was beginning to think about entering the class.

The “baby” church has five or six strong, grown-up men, already baptized, and numbers of others who have

entered the catechumen's class, as well as some who are quite beginners. The first movement towards Christianity began with one who was never baptized ; he came across a Christian boatman, who exhorted him to worship God. This man told others in his village, and they decided to invite a teacher from the Ching-ho Church to come and teach them and establish a church there.

The request was gladly responded to and a church member sent to conduct Sunday services regularly, the services being held at the house of the man who first heard the gospel. He was a well-known, clever gambler, bold and wicked, but from the time he began to worship, some reformation of character took place, and many of his big outstanding sins were given up. He became a more respectable member of society, but was never considered eligible for full admission into church membership, because his home relationships were not put right.

Two years ago, a big sorrow came into this man's life in the death of his eldest son, a lad of fifteen years of age, who died peacefully in the Christian faith. His father, in speaking of the " passing " of his son, showed how much superstition and idolatry still swayed his life and thoughts. He told us that he knew evil spirits were in his house at the time of his boy's death, so he exploded fire-crackers to " frighten them away " ; also that he heard a peculiar noise, both in the loft and downstairs, " and then," he said, " my boy's soul left the house by the back door. Afterwards all was perfect peace, and I knew he had found a happy resting-place."

This sad loss seemed to harden his heart more than ever towards his wife, and he took no more interest

in his home or younger son. There were frequent quarrels between him and his wife, and on many occasions he threatened to kill her ; once he snatched up a knife and in a savage way proceeded to sharpen it in front of her. She fled in terror to the church at Ching-ho, taking her little son with her, and remained there for over a year.

In the meantime the church members prayed and worked for the salvation of this man ; they tried hard to persuade him to receive his wife back again, but he refused to do so and remained callous, and was adamant on the subject.

One day he disappeared, and has never been seen or heard of since. It appears that he rose as usual that last morning, cooked his breakfast, and walked out of his house, apparently to his usual work in the fields, but never returned, and what became of him remains a mystery.

His disappearance was not made known for a couple of days, his brother thinking he had perhaps gone to relations, but as some days passed without his return, the brother became uneasy ; inquiries were made, but nobody had seen or heard anything of the missing man. Three search-parties were sent in different directions and a reward offered for information as to his whereabouts ; they dragged the river, searched the mountains, the high roads, and villages, but there was no trace of him, nor had any one seen him anywhere. His disappearance was so mysterious that the villagers, his relations, and even his Christian friends, came to the conclusion that he had been led away by the fox-demon, of which he had always been much afraid. One of his friends told me that one night when the missing man was returning from a house

where he ought not to have been visiting, he lighted a flaring torch of pitch-pine, it being a dark and starless night. Hearing something following him, he turned round and saw he was being pursued by the fox-demon all the way back to his home, and now they think he has been led away to death by this same demon.

This is Chinese superstition, of course, but the sudden and entire disappearance of this man, and of many others, from time to time, without taking money or possessions with them and leaving no trace behind, is one of the many strange things one hears of in this strange land.

In Ching-ho City, quite lately, another such strange disappearance occurred. A young man, in perfect health, walked out of his home to go to his daily work and never returned ; but in his case, after consulting a " spirit medium," his relations found the dead body on the mountains, in the exact place where the medium indicated, and, it is said, there were certain mysterious marks on the body, which to the Chinese proved that he was lured there by a malevolent demon.

Here in Ching-ho, the church services were held in the shop of a silversmith, and there we gathered for worship on Sunday morning. The platform was about five feet long, four feet broad, with a long rail one foot and a half in height around it. A rather high table stood in the centre of the platform, with high, backless stools on either side, while long, backless benches and forms, painted red, completed the church furniture.

The most unsightly parts of the walls were papered with Chinese newspapers, while a white scroll, with the Ten Commandments written on it in large, hand-

some, black Chinese characters, was hung up over the platform table.

Just before worship began, a little final sweeping was done to the mud floor, straw kneeling-mats were placed around, and our service opened with a hymn of praise, the accompaniment being played on a concertina by the schoolmaster, who, on that occasion, conducted the service.

The singing was loud and hearty, and there were efforts by some, at least, to follow time and tune; but for the most part they “walked each his own road,” in true country style. While we were singing, one’s thoughts (in spite of one!) flew over the sea to the homelands. I saw the beautiful quiet churches, the softly tinted windows, through which the “dim religious light” shone on the well-dressed congregation; one could visualise it all so well, and I heard again the sweetly modulated voices of the choir. Then, my heart was lifted up in gratitude to God for the greater privilege of being allowed to worship with those “other sheep” in the “uttermost parts of the earth,” in a little mud hut, windowless and chairless, but with its front facing the Everlasting Hills.

The sermon was based on the text—“God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth,” and the expounding was a curious mixture of the very simplest as well as of the very deepest truths contained in the Word.

This little village is built on the river, at the foot of a cluster of hills covered with large tea plantations.

The green leaves are gathered in the early spring, and taken to the “tea-hongs” or warehouses in Ching-ho City, six miles away, which is the centre of the tea trade of the district. The roasting, preparing,

and packing of the tea for export is done by the men, but the picking and sorting out of the different kinds of tea-leaves is done entirely by women and girls, and the money earned by them is their own pin-money.

We constantly visit the "tea-hongs" in the spring and early summer, and sometimes have splendid opportunities of preaching the gospel to the women, as they sit at work.

The "hongs" are like hives of bees at swarming-time—hot, buzzing with noise, and fragrant with the delicious scent of the freshly gathered leaves. The most interesting part of the work takes place at the close of the day, when the weighing and paying time comes. There are generally three men doing this: one weighs each person's tea, a second reckons on the abacus the amount due, while the head of the firm doles out the copper coins to each in turn; it is all done swiftly, deftly, and methodically.

The picking and sorting looks such easy work, and it is pleasant to watch the quick fingers of even quite little girls.

Judging by the pleasant, cheerful atmosphere of the "tea-hongs" and the bonhomie of the workers towards one another, they all really enjoy their work and their wages, so that *we*, also, may drink and enjoy *our* cups of tea, knowing that there is neither forced labour nor "sweating" in its production if it comes from this part of the world.

Chinese village life may, however, seem grey and dreary as one looks at it from the Western point of view. There are two expressions one hears frequently upon the lips of the villagers: the first is, "Slowly, slowly," and the other the Chinese equivalent of,

“It cannot be helped.” We know that habit forms character, and I sometimes think that the habit of constantly using these two expressions has in some measure helped to form the character of the Chinese, making them slow in mind and action, narrow in vision, as well as superstitious and fatalistic in outlook, though they have also, in their make-up, the faithfulness, patient endurance, and solidity of character which go to the making of martyrs. The expression, “It cannot be helped,” is used automatically and lightly on most occasions, but sometimes, and in some cases, and in times of real trouble, it comes as a cry from an imprisoned soul with the fuller, deeper meaning of, “There is no way out.”

If money is lost in speculation, instead of dealing with the real evil they resign themselves to the loss by saying, “It cannot be helped.”

If there is death in the home, the mourners are consoled by sympathetic friends and neighbours with the words, “Do not weep; it cannot be helped.”

If some one is ill and relatives are being urged to go some distance for medical aid, “It cannot be helped; we don’t know where to get medicine,” is the dirge one hears.

We were visiting a village lately only two miles from “Pine River City.” There was a sad young mother there, with a baby boy who was very ill. He was her only child, and she was in great trouble. They had tried many different kinds of herb medicines and a local quack doctor had been attending the child, but with no good result. I asked the child’s mother whether she had any friends in “Pine River City” to whom she could go? “Yes,” she said; “my own relatives live there.” Then it was suggested that she should take



A GROUP OF "HOPEFULS"

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[Photo: McTavish & Co., Shanghai.]

her boy and stay with her relatives, and we would be glad to help her with foreign medicine. She listened hopelessly and helplessly; presently a young man came into the guest-hall where we were sitting.

"Is that your husband?" I asked.

"Yes," was the answer, given with a burst of weeping; "he cares nothing for his home, nor for his son. He has gambled most of his property away, and what is left is being spent on opium-smoking, and we have nothing!"

Oh, the many, many broken hearts, the broken homes, and broken lives one is constantly coming in contact with, in this work! I looked at her husband—a delicate-looking, broken-down wreck, his will-power weakened by constant indulgence in the drug—and felt that it was absolutely futile to depend on him for help. The woman's brother-in-law and several women relatives were also standing by, but not one of them would lift a hand to help or even promise to bring mother and child to her friends. Presently she sobbed out the words, "It can't be helped; I have no road to walk on; it can't be helped, it can't be helped." We had to leave them—it was getting late, and we feared the city gates would be shut and locked if we stayed longer, but we first extracted an unwilling promise from the neighbours to help the poor young mother and her sick boy.

If a thief thieves, the victims of the theft console themselves by thinking, and sometimes saying, "It can't be helped; thieves must also live, and eat!" These words were actually said to me once, on the occasion of the theft of a warm sheep-skin coat, which had just been bought.

If your servant, by careless handling, happens to

break your favourite little olive-green itinerating teapot (though, as a rule, crockery has a way of breaking *itself*, in China) he smiles the most charmingly innocent smile and says, "It cannot be helped," and you take the spoiling of your goods calmly, on the outside, even if, "*inside*," things may be rather in confusion!

Family life is very simple, and its needs are few, ordinary families being content with little space in their houses—a kitchen and one or two small, dark bedrooms sufficing for their requirements, while, being a most sociable people, all share the one common guest-hall. They need very little furniture, very little clothing (especially in the summer-time!), very little food save rice, and very little money passes through the hands of the ordinary villagers. They seem content and happy without many of the things we Westerners think are life's essentials, but *no* family is happy or contented without children. *They* are the real source of all the happiness in a Chinese home. "I have over thirty children and grandchildren," said a proud old dame to me one day, and I replied, quite properly, "Your happiness is very great!"

One of the saddest things in China is a childless wife or widow. One day, when visiting, we came to a house where there were several families living. There were swarms of children playing together in the guest-hall; a young woman was sitting there with a bonny fat baby in her arms, so I went forward to play with the baby for a moment. "Is he your little son?" I asked her. A sad, sad expression crept over her face; she answered, "Oh no! I have not got that much happiness in my life." A woman sitting by her whispered to me, "She is very sad, for all her children

die immediately they are born." One felt it was difficult to speak the word of comfort, when faced with sorrow and disappointment such as that.

In another house where a woman was mending a ragged-looking garment, I said, "You are looking very sad; are you in any special trouble?" With a flood of tears, straight from a breaking heart, she poured forth a tale of sorrow and of sin, and through it came the sad wail, "My children are all dead; my children are all dead!" In attempting a helpful word, the Biblewoman cited a few cases of prodigal sons, saying, "It is better to have no sons than un-filial and wicked ones, who would only cause you trouble. Look at the many mothers around you, mourning the wickedness of their sons, some using up all their property in gambling, others spending it in opium-smoking, others in every kind of wickedness, and giving no money to their wives or mothers." She was answered with the sad, wailing words, "An opium-smoking son is still a son; a wicked son is still a son, but I have none!"

A villager's daily employments would probably seem to us mundane in the extreme. Every article of clothing for either sex is made in the home by the women, as well as the endless mending and patching—so endless, that frequently there is little left of the original garment! Shoes and stockings are also made by them, and when the dinner-bowls are cleared away, and the animals fed, a large work-basket filled with rags is brought out, a bowl of flour-paste provided, and they make their shoe-soles; small pieces of old rag are pasted layer upon layer, until the right thickness required for the sole is reached, then it is cut to the size and shape needed. It may be rough, coarse,

unlovely work, and yet it is so patiently performed ! I stood one day beside two women as they toiled, and said to them, “Are you not tired of pasting all the time ?” “It can’t be helped,” was the answer. “We must make enough shoes for the household for the year.” Their work is varied a little bit by embroidery for their aprons and children’s caps, perhaps for their own tiny shoes. They have no recreation beyond gossiping, card-playing, or occasional visits to the theatre.

Is it any wonder that the Biblewomen in their preaching sometimes describe heaven as a beautiful place of rest ? Such a haven makes a strong appeal to sad, tired women !

CHAPTER XIV

EMERGENCY DAYS

THERE is a throb in the air, as if Nature's pulse had begun to beat a quicker measure.

These are often emergency days, when sudden and unexpected things happen. It is spring term in the Women's School at Pine River City. The perfume and growth of spring is in the air, and all Nature teems with life and movement, and spring has come into our hearts also. The spirit of resurrection is abroad, and I want to write the word "Hope" over every pupil. It is the month of April, Pine River City's most beautiful month; everything is in bloom, and there is the freshness and fragrance of growth and sweetness in the air. Every bit of broken wall has covered its unsightliness with pure, white jasmine; each bit of waste ground has come to life again and is starred with wild roses and pink trailers, and every hedge and bank is contributing its quota of greenery and colour. The very stones that compose the city wall are no longer grey and bare, but covered with colour and growth; the plum and peach orchard flowers have already begun to form into fruit, while the background of purple and blue mountains are gorgeously arrayed in every colour under the sun. Is it any wonder that spring has come into our hearts as well?

We are all seated round a long table in the school-

room ; it is the first lesson hour, the time when both pupils and teachers are at their best and freshest. Lips that have as yet never opened in prayer now begin to lisp forth the words, "Abba, Father," and it is the time when we expect most spiritual results from the sowing of the Living Word. We have been reading together the Parable of the Sower, and expounding it to young women who are hearing it for the first time has been a great joy ; now comes the application, and the earnest replies of some of them to the personal questions.

"What did our Lord mean by the 'soil' in the parable ?"

"We are the soil," some one answers—"ourselves, our hearts."

"You have all heard the parable explained. Now, what kind of soil are you going to be ?"

"The good soil !"

"How much fruit are you going to bring forth to the glory of God ?"

"A hundredfold," is the answer, given quickly, eagerly, but without any deep sense of the responsibility involved. Two words of the Master come to one's mind, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of," and "Are ye able ?" They answer, "We are able." My little band of new pupils think they are able now ; it is so much easier to be a Christian in the school than back in their own heathen environment ! The historical incidents find their repetition in the daily life of every Chinese home. The messages of the Book are all so wonderfully new and fresh to them ; even the vocabulary in which the messages are clothed needs constant explanation sentence by sentence. "There is much flavour in it," said one of them to-day,

as we finished our class ; " it is very good to hear and read."

Next morning we gather again round the table for the reading and expounding of the Parable of the Tares. It is a solemn lesson, and the class becomes, to one's inner sense, a field of wheat with also, alas ! big patches of tares. The central thought seems to be, " Let both grow together until the harvest." Give each her full chance and opportunity of salvation, no pulling up, no rash judging of motives, but a careful, prayerful sowing, watering, and tending of the living seed on the part of the sower, and then trust in the Lord of the Harvest for results. The prayers of some of the more advanced Christians at the close seem earnest enough to shake that field of wheat to its very roots, until of itself one feels it must expel every tare, and also the enemy that sowed them.

On the left of the table sits a gentle, delicately featured woman, the widow of a literary man, and herself also belonging to a literary family ; she is a four-year-old Christian now, and I well remember the first day she came to school. A friend of hers was at that time a pupil, a hot-hearted Christian with remarkable power in prayer. One morning, when class was over, she requested my leave to go out of school for a while to invite a friend of hers. " I want to get her saved," she said ; " I have been praying much for her, and I think God wants me to go for her now." Rules and regulations and red-tapism gladly and always give way when there is a soul to be saved, so away she went to bring a lost sheep home to the fold. She returned in about two hours, accompanied by this nice widow, whose heart the Lord had already opened and prepared, and she received the truth almost im-

mediately and was eventually baptized. Four years have passed since then, years filled with light and shade, sunshine and rain, for her, but she has cast in her lot with the people of God for all time. She knows and believes that our God is her God, and "He will be her Guide until the going down of the sun." This widow's greatest trial at present is her only son, who is over twenty years of age and more or less of a waster. He comes of literary stock, but the brain-power and common sense of his ancestors seem to have been exhausted before reaching him, and he never makes good at any work he takes up.

Next to her sits a thin, heartbroken-looking young widow with two delicate children; her husband died last year, and Christian friends persuaded her to come to school, in the hope that she might be comforted and saved and become strong enough to take up the threads of life again on her return home. She is beginning to take some interest in things around her, and is looking brighter and happier already.

Farther down are seated two young married women and a younger girl, all three of whom have walked twenty miles over the mountains from their riverside village, escorted by the husband of one of them, who, on arrival, dumped down a heavy load off his shoulders with a bang, out of which popped two well-grown, naughty children and their little bundle of clothing!

At the foot of the table there is a woman, landed rather unwillingly at the school by her husband, who wishes her to become a Christian. She has a young baby girl with her and looks as if she does not quite know how she got here, nor why she is here, though she is one of the most interesting of all the class to the teacher, because she is the first one from her

village to come to school, and great things are hoped for in consequence.

On the right side of the table there is a Christian woman from another village called "Mountain Pit," thirteen miles away—also the only Christian woman in her village, though her earnest prayers show how she longs for others to come into the Light. She and three others of our class are Christians, all the rest being in various stages of newness and rawness, and there are twenty-three present, not counting the children.

There is another young woman pupil, who, after prayers, announces that she must go home. She is weeping bitterly, as she sobs out the words, "I must go home! I fear my husband will pawn everything for opium." She is one of the many innocent sufferers through the terrible opium drug. Six or seven years ago her husband's household was one of the richest in the city, with a large property, though even then they were beginning to slip down the hill, through her father-in-law's indulgence in opium. The old man has passed away, and his son, still under thirty years of age, is fast following in his footsteps, selling piece by piece every article of value, and even pawning the household furniture.

All, or rather all that he has power to sell, of the field property has already gone in smoke; there is still this young wife and one little girl left, both of whom belong to the man, and are as saleable as his fields. "He will sell you, too, and your little girl; you had better remain where you are for the present," advises her mother-in-law; but she prefers the risk, and will go back to her sadly broken-up home. We are so sorry to lose her, as she is but the veriest beginner

in the Christian life, and has hardly enough foundation as yet on which to base a living faith in the Living God.

Well, we know something of what real prayer means out here, prayer deep and strong and desperate, the expression of need that gives a sense of urgency, that seems strong enough to “take the Kingdom of Heaven by force,” that knocks at the door of heaven, and at the Heart of God with pleading insistence until the door is opened and the power up yonder is set free for the help, comfort, and salvation of the lost and needy down here.

Such a prayer was sent forth on the wings of faith by a woman to-day, after the morning lesson. It was Exodus xxxi. that gave the keynote. “God gave wisdom and understanding to work in gold, silver, and brass.” The woman’s husband is a silver-smith and able to earn good wages, if only he would work at his trade; but, unfortunately, the best of his days are spent in gambling and loafing about, instead of “beating silver” for his living. She had got another fresh plea: “Lord, You have given him the skill, add this grace also, willingness to use it. Lord, make him honest and make him stop gambling and sin.” Need produces prayer, the kind of prayer that is utterly indifferent to, and perhaps unconscious of, the presence of others; that cares only that God Himself shall hear and understand.

These days have been “emergency days.” There has been a theft, a pretty big one too, in the school. The matron went to her room to make up her school accounts, unlocked her box to take money out, and found it had been stolen, also some pairs of silver bracelets and other trinkets. The box had been

broken into from the back, and the hinges wrenched off. Who could have done it? Surely none of the pupils, and yet the matron's suspicion fell upon this new one, and on that. There was no special reason for doubting any of them, except that they were not Christians; but the Chinese quickly doubt one another. The theft was cleverly done and there was no trace of the thief. We gathered round the table for our usual lesson and worship, but somehow spring had given place to the cold blight of winter in our hearts. The matron looked pale and haggard after a sleepless night, and the pupils scared and tearful—prayer was focused on the discovery of the thief and the clearing of the school from all blame.

On Sunday afternoon our service was over and we were beginning to disperse, when a loud outcry from our own house arrested the attention of every one. Another theft, a much bigger one, had taken place, and there was no doubt this time, for the thief had broken in through a window. One's first feeling was one of thankfulness that the school's good name was cleared! A third theft was discovered later on, and all three were perpetrated on Sundays while we were at church, the thieves having discovered a locked and silent house, and easily scalable compound walls!

One evening lately, when returning from a walk, we were passing a narrow part of the road with a deep ditch on one side. A sound of heavy stertorous breathing led us to look down. There was a little boy of twelve or thirteen years of age, lying in a badly crumpled-up position in the ditch. There were some men close at hand and we called for help—being a foreigner, one dare not touch him, especially when there was other help at hand. My Chinese companion

had already recognised the child, and had gone for his parents. The men, passing by, looked into the ditch, but made no effort to help him out, one of them even remarking indifferently, "What little girl is thrown away?" and then passed on.

At last a kindly neighbour jumped down and lifted up the limp, helpless little body, but quickly placed him back again on the ground, saying, "Ah, yah! an evil influence; an evil influence!" He then shouted and stamped on the ground all around with his feet. In the meantime the boy's parents reached the place; they, too, instead of lifting their boy out of the ditch, first stamped all round, shouting loudly all the while, to drive off the evil spirits, while the crowd which had quickly gathered kept calling out, "Send for the exorcist, send for the exorcist!"

"Lift the child out of the ditch, and carry him home and send for the doctor," I suggested.

"We must not, we must not; the demon must be exorcised first, else he will die." They sent for a wadded quilt and wrapped the boy up and placed him more comfortably, and the parents remained there with him, wailing at intervals and calling loudly to the boy's soul, "My boy, come home, come home!"—until the little fellow passed away about midnight, still out in the open.

It is the cruelty of heathenism that is so trying, so difficult to endure, and the feeling of utter helplessness when faced with such bondage to this dreadful superstitious fear and dread of evil spirits. Afterwards, when talking over the sad accident, our mission servant voiced what one wanted to say so badly, but dared not; "These heathen are not human; they are like animals, the same!" This was in reference to

what a kind heathen friend had remarked: "It was good you had not touched or lifted the boy; they would have blamed you for his death if you had done so." These accidents occur, of course, in Western lands, but there is a Christian environment of trust and confidence surrounding them there, and help can always be offered and accepted; there are hospitals and doctors and nurses within reach; there is a sympathetic atmosphere and the knowledge that all is being done that can be done for the sufferer, but here, in a heathen land, there is none of this. The whole environment is difficult, and the atmosphere filled with doubts and fears, and bondage which make for utter impotence.

Another emergency to-day! It is afternoon, and school is in full swing, old and young reading and memorising at the very tops of their voices. "Things are very lively and bright in here," said a visitor. "I must sit and listen to the sounds." How the Chinese love noise and liveliness, even if it is only the youngsters quarrelling under the table, and the babies demanding nourishment in an F sharp tone!

Suddenly an excited man's voice is heard calling out, "Come forth, Sister; protect the postmaster; he is about to be shot by the soldiers!" It is our nice postman who is calling, and of course there is a rush of pupils and teachers to hear what has occurred. The postmaster is betrothed to one of our foundling girls, therefore his appeal to us! The emergency seemed so urgent, that, without waiting for his excited story, the compound servants were sent to the rescue, and afterwards we heard the details of the affair.

The postmaster is newly appointed, and cannot speak our dialect; the soldiers are all from the north,

and speak various tongues, and one of them went to the post office on business, and made his request in a high-handed manner, and in a tongue not understood by the postmaster, who answered him abruptly and probably rather roughly. The soldier became angry, rushed out, and brought back with him a band of armed "braves" like himself, who took possession both of the office and of the person of the postmaster. Happily a few of the church members went to the rescue of the unhappy and indignant young man—peace was made with the soldiers on his behalf, though only at the expense of "loss of face" and the explosion of strings of fire-crackers in token of apology! The episode, however, shows the spirit of the times in which we are living—only the smallest spark being needed to set alight volcanic explosions in every direction.

It is a great privilege to be permitted to live with, and share the daily life for a while, of a simple Chinese family; what strikes one most is their patient contentment with so little of what we Westerners think of such value, though I sometimes wish, oh, how I wish, that they knew how to want more!

I remember how we were once living in a loft over a goat-house in a quiet riverside village, sharing the home life of the goatherd's family. The goats are in their own apartments certainly, and being only "second-class passengers" they are "not allowed on our deck"; but we are all under the same roof, and the entrance to our apartment is through theirs. The goats give us no trouble, however, and I have no objection to *their* being included in the category of "our brothers, the animals," though I absolutely refuse to have the rats included, because they have

so often turned otherwise peaceful and quiet nights into hideous and fearful nightmares!

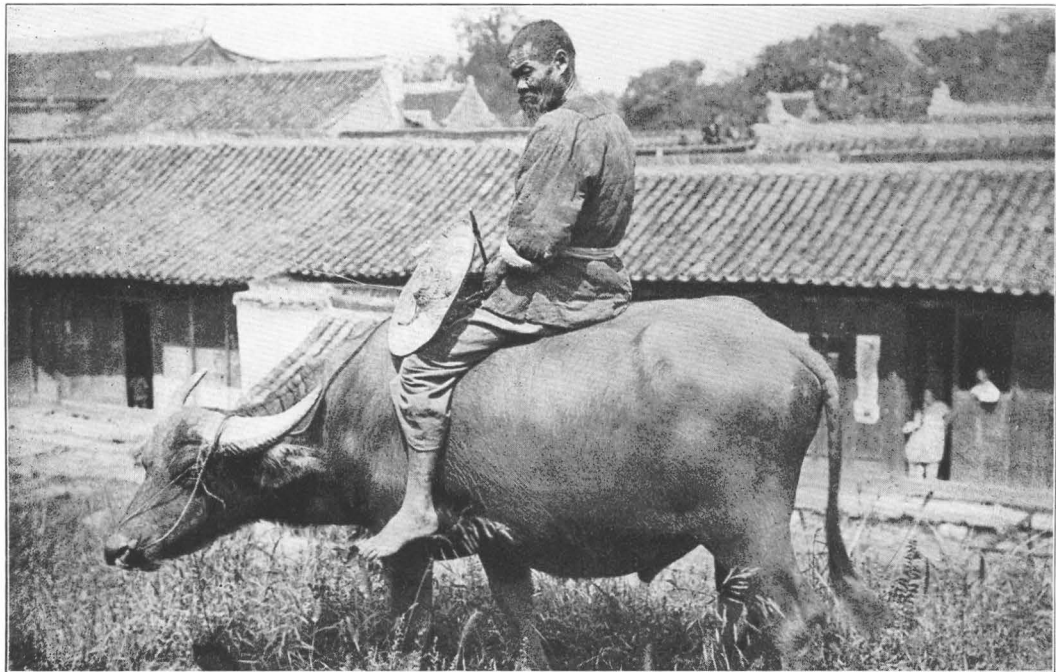
We had some difficulty in getting to this village, because the river had been overflowing its banks for some days, and consequently boats were scarce. We had hired one, but the boatman came to tell us that as it was still raining hard, his cargo of tea must be placed inside, under the cover where the passengers generally sit, and that there was no other covered place for us. He offered to take us, if we cared to sit in an open bamboo raft alongside, out in the rain, which was then pouring—not cats and dogs as it does in Western lands, but elephants! Considering ourselves (to ourselves!) even more valuable than his cargo of tea, we declined this by no means tempting offer, and hired chairs to carry us down by road instead.

It sounds delightfully easy to get into chairs and be carried down by men; two ragged, gloomy, cross-tempered-looking men came alongside, took up my chair by its poles, and swung it backwards and forwards to test the weight, then announced that as it was an “ocean chair” (a foreigner’s private chair), they must have more money for carrying it! This bargaining caused a first delay; then more delay while they disappeared to smoke opium; then more delay because it was raining (though at last we got under weigh); then more delays at every rest-house, while all the time they grumbled at the weight of the chair, and the weight of oneself, until I felt humbled to the dust! At last we arrived at our destination, where they grumbled again for more money, first, because the chair was heavy, then more again because it was the first month of the Chinese New Year Calendar.

Presently all grumbles were satisfactorily disposed of, the chair-coolies smiled and bowed their thanks, and wended their way homewards, while we mounted the ladder to our loft above the goats.

Our hosts are simple, country people, their only means of livelihood being the goats; their warm welcome and kind hospitality are very precious. Some of the family are already Christians, others are beginning to learn, while all are friendly and ready for teaching. On our arrival at the house we noticed a gentle, sad-looking young girl, who came forward with a tray of hot cups of tea for us. I asked who she was, and they told me she was a near relative who was spending the day with them; her sad face attracted my notice, but just then there was no opportunity for talking to her. Next day we heard she had gone home at dusk the night before and that early in the morning she had attempted to commit suicide by hanging herself from the roof of her own bedroom. Happily she was rescued, though already quite unconscious, and after treatment she recovered. Then a sad story came to light: her young life had been made so absolutely miserable by an ignorant and cruel husband, and an equally ignorant and cruel mother-in-law, that she thought going out into the dark "unknown" would be preferable; truly the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty for many a friendless and helpless one.

Daylight sees the family stirring; they need no clock—the cock-crow is their call-bell, assisted by the birds of the forest around. The daughter-in-law is the first to rise; it is her work to light the kitchen fire, then comes the scraping of the rice-pot, and the cooking of the simple breakfast. There are two



A CHINESE BUFFALO—BUT NOT A VERY TYPICAL DRIVER

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[Photo: McTavish & Co., Shanghai

regular daily home morning sounds from which one cannot escape—the first being the scraping of the iron rice-pot when itinerating in the villages, the second the scraping of the breakfast toast when at home in the mission-house ! These two sounds seem peculiar to China, and are somehow unlike any other sounds on the face of the habitable earth !

Breakfast over, the second son, a strong, beautifully mannered, cheerful-tempered boy of eleven or twelve years of age, is away to the mountains with the goats, where he will remain herding them all day, until the dusk and supper-time send him back home. The old father goes to the garden to work among the vegetables there, weeding, watering, planting, except when he is sitting on a long bamboo chair, enjoying his pipe, which occurs often, and seems to be the principal part of his day's work !

The women spend their time in the constant round of household duties—washing the clothes, patching, mending, and making ; feeding the animals and taking care of the household treasure, little Pomegranate ; the cleaning of the house is not included in the daily round of household duties. I wish it were ! For that important work, a lucky day has to be chosen once a year, and as this is the first month the lucky day has already passed, and now a very little tidying up is all that can be expected for the next twelve months.

The eldest son, who is the real burden-bearer of the family, will not be seen again until dusk. I watched him come home last evening, bearing upon his shoulders a heavy load of cut wood ; when he came into the wood-house he dumped his heavy burden down with a sharp sigh and groan ; then he saw me, and imme-

diately smiled a greeting, with a cheery nod, but I knew he was a tired man with aching shoulders. He came into the house, took off his straw sandals, washed his feet, and tidied himself; then he took his baby daughter in his arms, and it was easy to see that three-months-old Pomegranate was her father's little ewe lamb. I am glad to say she responded to his love with all her baby heart, smiling, crooning, and gurgling to him until the tired lines in his face were all smoothed away. A little later the boy returned from the mountains with his goats, and presently I saw him making up bundles of evil-smelling garlic for sale. He held up one of the bundles for me to see, and, with the most charming smile, said, “Don't you think it is a good pennyworth?” After they were all sold he showed me his six pennies, and was as happy and contented as if he had just earned six pounds. By this time the night had fallen, and it was dark, so they soaked a few strings of pith in vegetable oil, lighted it, and set it on a stand; then all the family gathered for the evening meal. When supper was over, we chatted for a while in the guest-hall; then came family prayers, and we committed one another to the care of the Heavenly Father, and all retired to rest.

A few days later we left the village, and as our chairs passed out to the high road facing the mountains, we saw our little friend again, riding a great, rough, grey water-buffalo. He was dressed in a faded blue suit, with sandalled feet and bare legs, a large bamboo hat on his head, and a wood-knife jauntily stuck through his belt. What a picture he made! How I wished I had my camera! He rode up to our chairs, and with the grace and courtesy of a little prince bade

us "good-bye," saying, "Peace, Sister, peace ; slowly, slowly go, but come back soon again to visit us." How one thanks God for the blessings of simple home life, family affection, and the love of little children—blessings so freely bestowed by the Heavenly Father upon every race and clime.

A fortnight later the Angel of Death visited that riverside village—when he had passed by, our little Pomegranate was missing.

CHAPTER XV

WHAT IF THE LIGHT FAILS ?

IT was very early when we set out for Pine River City. We were on our way up-country to the Kien-ning Prefecture, for we had to take a journey of many miles, at the rate of three miles an hour, before sunset. We began preparations not long after midnight by calling up the gardener to go into the town and awaken the chair-coolies and loadmen, in order to be ready to start, if possible, before dawn.

I could hear the dogs barking in every direction ; they were in sympathy, probably, with the old man, who grumbled at being called up so early and talked to himself all the way to the town !

We were all ready to start. Our holiday was over, the good-byes said, and I in my chair, while the moon was still shining high and clear. What a morning ! The palest of pale rose tints were beginning to spread over the sky, slowly deepening and spreading, until mountains and valleys were bathed in a sea of warm rose ; then suddenly, out of somewhere, there stole a mysterious, bluish, steely light, which touched the mountain peaks, making them stand out clear and cold on every side against the sky ; the moon faded gradually into the blue, then the sun rose in all his splendour above the hilltops. It was the birth of the morning !

The way was very beautiful, at first leading through

fertile valleys of waving grain, well-cultivated fields, and comfortable-looking villages, dotted amongst the trees and foothills. The hillsides were a sight, with large trailing sprays of deep, velvety purple vetch, almost as beautiful as wistaria ; here and there a pale, delicate orchid peeped out from its hiding-place amongst the luxuriant grasses and ferns, and flaming yellow lilies, wild hydrangea, and dewy mossy banks, covered with gentian as blue as the blue above them, met our gaze on either hand.

We heard stories of the depredations of wild beasts, which roam among the mountains and sometimes come down close to the villages ; then, woe betide the pigs ! Tigers, of course !—and also wild boars and creatures of the lynx tribe, which, they say, frequently make fierce attacks even on buffaloes and cows.

We spent that first night in a large flourishing village. It was almost dark when we arrived, and on going down a long narrow lane we came to a big, old, rambling Chinese house where there were two Christian women, who gave us a warm welcome.

A room was fitted up for service, and later we gathered there for evening prayers, led by the evangelist in charge. This house is the Gospel Lighthouse of the district, and from there the light shines, and is diffused throughout the villages and towns around. A clean room is kept in the loft for foreign visitors, and only those who know what Chinese inns are like can fully appreciate such a resting-place on a journey.

The next day we were off again. For a while the road led round the foothills and through the valleys, but presently we began to ascend to higher ground and a more mountainous region, until we must have been quite three thousand feet high, with range after

range of higher mountains stretching away to the horizon.

It is now noon-time ; I am sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree by the roadside—there are towering mountains and masses of rocks all round me as well as in the distance. We have left the fruitful valleys behind, and now for some miles there will be bare hills, with only narrow ravines between ; the rocky hillsides are mostly covered with tough strong bracken, high coarse grass and ferns, palms, stunted pines, firs, and bamboo bushes, interspersed with dark granite boulders, looking as if they would furnish safe lurking-places for the wild animals of the neighbourhood. My coolies are still in the rest-house at the top, enjoying their well-earned pipes, and I am quite alone here, having walked down the pass. There are few travellers on these mountain roads. It is one of those all too rare and very precious days when the invisible becomes visible, heaven seems very near, the whole being goes forth “ in one salutation to Thee, my God,” and the heart is drawn wholly upward. I am thanking God in my heart for His beautiful world and for the power to enjoy it. The perfect stillness is broken only by the murmur of the stream rushing and foaming over its rocky bed in the ravine below and the harsh scissor-grinding noise of the cicadas in the pines. The hot sun has been kind enough to veil himself behind thick grey clouds, or one could not be sitting here ; the sky is dull and the clouds are casting strange shadows over the ravines and gullies, tinting the mountains themselves with soft, smoky, unfamiliar hues.

A few terraces of rice, on the lower slopes of the ravine which divides this hill against which I am leaning from the one opposite, indicate that there is

a village or hamlet near by ; probably it is hidden behind the grove of feathery bamboos a little lower down the pass, and we shall see it when we turn the next corner.

The sons of toil who occupy the hamlets amongst these hills, though industrious enough, are miserably poor, and live mostly on dried sweet potato parings mixed with rice, which they call "potato-rice." Their lot is cast in a very beautiful but wild and barren district, and life for them consists in wresting from the hard soil of the rock-strewn hillsides and narrow valleys just enough sustenance to keep body and soul together.

On the journey to-day the deserted tumble-down hamlets, the skeletons of houses and débris we passed by are silent reminders of what were once busy, noisy homes. If they could speak to us they would tell stirring and pathetic tales of brave men and women and even little children who toiled patiently and uncomplainingly, day in, day out, with very little of life's joy and sweetness—except, perhaps, in family affection—until the tired bodies gave up the struggle and they were gathered to their fathers.

Whenever we stopped to rest in the villages the people crowded round my chair, partly to see the foreigner, but more often to ask for medicine. I was so sorry to have none with me, but glad, too, to be able to tell them of the Women's Hospital at Dong-kau, not so very far away. How we need more medical missionaries ! There is a wide sphere of labour waiting for them in itinerating work up and down the valleys of these most needy districts. One hears tales, heart-rending tales, of men, women, and children who suffer on, without help or amelioration of their condition,

day after day ; and there are many blind people groping about in darkness, suffering intensely, who, if properly attended to, might be healed and made to see. There are the maimed and lame, who might be whole and strong if only they could have had proper surgical aid.

We came later to a large and prosperous town where the coolies stopped for dinner.

Many people gathered round my chair, and again there were requests for medicines, poor things !

A nice, friendly woman invited me to have some hot tea, and in answer to my inquiries said there were some Christians and a centre for worship there—another little lighthouse ! When we left that town we came out into more open country, low-lying hills, wider, richer valleys, and snug-looking villages.

We reached the town of Dong-kau in the early evening. This is the very prettiest, most picturesque place possible, set high amongst the Everlasting Hills. Our mission compound is at the entrance of the village, on a hill, as the Gospel Lighthouse should be, overlooking and diffusing its whole radiance on the town and country around. It is the centre of all the mission work of the district, and although there are only two foreign ladies keeping the light revolving there, they are ably assisted by a faithful band of Chinese workers.

After a happy few days of rest I went on my way, and spent the next night with a Christian family in a village near the borders of my own county of Ching-ho. A daughter of this Christian household had been to school at Dong-kau, and had finished her education there, and was now married to a non-Christian young man, the betrothal having taken place when they were both very young, before either family had thought

of becoming Christian. A betrothal is almost, if not quite, as binding as an actual marriage, so when the girl became old enough, the marriage had to take place, though much against the wishes of the Christian girl.

I had a delightful time with this girl. She has established a small day school, which she teaches in her father's house, in this way doing her bit of service for God. Her greatest desire is to win her husband, out and out, for Christ, and she is winning him too. They say she is a little lighted candle in that dark heathen village, and it seemed to me she was indeed a true light-bearer there. She introduced her husband, a boy of eighteen years of age, and he told me he was a believer in the Lord Jesus now, and wished to give his life to the work of an evangelist.

Next day I left that happy Christian home, and for two days' journey the way led through a wholly unevangelised region in my own district, with never a glimmer of the true light shining.

The scenery was wonderful, the mountains thickly wooded, and one could hear the constant slashing of the woodman's axe cutting down trees, far up in the pine forests; then at intervals, a peculiar rumbling sound, not unlike distant thunder. It was the trunks of trees being rolled, one after the other, down the cleared slopes of the mountain to the level ground, from which place they would be carried on the shoulders of men to the distant river, and so floated in rafts to their destination.

We met a long string of these wood-carriers, true "sons of toil"—each great, heavy trunk with two men carrying it, and each man had an extra notched pole, with which they lifted the heavy burden from their poor bent shoulders and rested a few moments,

from time to time. All labour and burden-bearing is done here by men and women. There is no machinery whatever and no cart traffic of any kind, nor are there any roads wide enough for carts or vehicles to traverse. Sedan-chairs, carried by men, are the only carriages known in these parts. Sometimes a rich family keep a little pony for joy-riding and for their recreations, but they never use it for travelling or work.

The ploughing and harrowing of the fields is done by water-buffaloes, great, coarse, strong beasts, supposed to have a certain merit for their help in the fields. Many of the country farmers object to eating their flesh on this account. One day we were trying to make our hearers understand what sin was, and that it needs atonement. “Sin!” said a man present. “I have no sin. I have never killed any one, nor have I eaten the flesh of a buffalo!”

When we reached the first village in the Ching-ho country and rested there, crowds of men came to my chair and looked in, asking all sorts of questions. The women were much too timid at first to come near, though after a while, when they found one was speaking to them in their own dialect, they were less frightened. I questioned the men, among other things, as to the principal industry of their village. “Fields,” they said; “we all work in the fields from dawn to dusk, we eat much sorrow with the fields.” We discussed the relative hardness of a shopkeeper’s and a farmer’s life. Sitting behind a counter and occasionally weighing out goods to buyers, in the slow Chinese way, appealed much to them.

At this village and at all others where we rested, it was good to have the opportunity of telling them of

the way of Salvation, and of exhorting them to worship the great God.

Another night was spent in an inn. *Such* a place ! I shall draw the curtain over it ! After a nightmare night, we were ready and off early for our last day's journey, which led all the way downhill to our county town of Ching-ho—a real Gospel Lighthouse, with an evangelist in charge. As I write, my mind visualises that large tract of country, in the Kien-ning Prefecture, with its hundreds of towns and villages, where a preacher of the gospel has never set foot, and where a glimmer of the true Light has never shone. Oh, that we could set up Lighthouses at every strategic point ! We *could* do so if only we had enough workers ! No village or town need really be without the " Light that lighteth every man."

I am thinking of the many young girls in the homelands who have finished school or college and have not yet decided on their life-work. Could they find a grander, nobler sphere than to give their lives to the Lord Jesus first, and then to the uplift, help, and salvation of the women and children of this far-away land, either in medical, educational, or evangelistic service ?

Is it worth it ? Is it a happy service ? These questions can be answered with an unqualified " Yes ! " " I was so glad, I walked on air for two days ! " said a missionary, when the doctors at last decided that she might return to her work. That is the feeling of every true missionary. There are the disappointing days, the lonely days, the days when things look very grey, but *none* of them counts in comparison with the joy of the Lord Himself, which is our strength as the days go by—the joy of being used by Him, even in the

smallest measure, to help and uplift others. We have our happiness in the people themselves, in knowing them, loving them, and being loved in return. They have so great a power of drawing forth the heart's love, sympathy, and respect, and of holding us for ever.

We were in the Red Sea steaming South, nearing the entrance to the Indian Ocean. It was that quiet hour after supper; the deck lights were lowered, and people were sitting together in little groups, while some were pacing slowly backwards and forwards talking. The night was very dark, moonless, and almost starless, and it seemed to hang over the ship like a thick, hot, black velvet cloak.

I was standing alone, looking out across the deep. Two men were passing, and snatches of their conversation reached me. Said one of them, "We seem to be going very slowly here."

"Yes," was the reply. "I hear this part is about the most difficult bit of navigation in the whole world." Then again, "We ought to be seeing the light from the lighthouse very soon; that is probably why we have slowed down." I looked across the dark expanse of waters, and watched, and waited anxiously. The thought came to me, "What if we *don't* see the light? What will happen to us all if the light should fail to-night?" Presently my heart gave a bound, for, from out of the darkness, a great, strong white beam shot across the waves, illuminating the whole sea for a moment. The light had not failed us! Immediately there was a stir, we got up steam, quickened our speed, and plunged boldly on into the night.

What if the Gospel Light should fail out here? Think of the countless numbers who are adrift on the

trackless, uncharted ocean of heathenism who will never find their way into Harbour if the Light fail!

What will happen to them—and to us—if the Light fail?

“*Ye are the light of the world,*” said the Master.

We dare not, we must not, let the Light fail.