Lunch hour at a Women's Bible School in Honan

THERE CAME A DAY . . .

BY

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FOREWORD

"THOU knowest not what a day may bring forth." My fellow missionary and I had been warned by letter that owing to the possibility of being cut off by the big Japanese offensive that was imminent, we might have to leave the little city in Honan where we had lived and worked for three or four years. Nevertheless, when, on the morning of the first Sunday in which services were held in the new church buildings, a telegram arrived urging immediate departure, it came as a shock which left us unnaturally calm and almost numbed.

Monday was a day we shall not easily forget. Into twenty-four hours were packed emotions to which there was neither time nor opportunity to give expression. We shrunk from the inevitable parting from the human beings with whom we had been associated so closely in the bonds of a love whose source was divine, not natural. We would have been glad to slip away without the strain of farewells. These Chinese men and women amongst whom we had lived had become part of our lives, and as they came to say good-bye the memories connected with each had to be suppressed, or the sudden sense of loss would have been almost overwhelming.

That day has been lived through many times since. This little cluster of character sketches of some of the men and women who came to our little mission compound on the last day we spent in Siangcheng is in some sense an expression of the affectionate emotion that had to be suppressed then. The New Creation, the Bride who is being prepared for Christ, is being formed in these human beings, and for that, more than for any other reason, they are precious.

I tried to keep the personal element in the background,

but somehow it was not altogether possible! If the personality of one of the missionaries has crept into this little book, it is because she, like the Chinese men and women among whom she lived, is only human!

PHYLLIS THOMPSON.

CHAPTER I

THE TELEGRAM

"TEACHER DONG!" The missionary was standing with a little group of men and women, looking happily round at the low buildings on all four sides of the small, muddy church compound. The buildings were very ordinary Chinese ones, with the usual heavy wooden doors and glassless windows; only one of them boasted a tiled roof, the others being merely thatched—and very inadequately thatched at that! One of them, which in no way differed in appearance from the others, was the church. In some ways it was an unsatisfactory affair, for it had been made large enough to accommodate about a hundred people by the simple but somewhat risky expedient of carving two arches in the wall that helped to support the roof, thus making two rooms into one. Teacher Dong and Teacher Way had looked on dubiously while this was being done, fearful of a complete collapse of wall and roof, but no such catastrophe had occurred, and now, in spite of rainy weather and muddy roads, the church building was gradually filling up with women and men, who walked in and looked around the freshly mudded walls with an interest that had something proprietary about it. This was the church they had bought with their own money, at the height of the famine. Many and precious were the gifts that had poured into the treasury during those lean, grey months; many were the prayers that had been offered up that the needed buildings might be found and purchased; many were the hours that had been spent in planning and discussing ways and means whereby the purchase could be effected. And although some of the ways and means had been sadly

tinged with the wisdom of this world, and were already bringing the crop of problems that must inevitably follow all that is not done according to the Truth, yet on this very first Sunday on the new church compound, the missionaries were conscious that the Lord, the gracious Lord, had not forsaken His people.

"Teacher Dong!" The missionary turned to find the tall figure of one of the deacons beside her. "Here is a telegram for you," he said in a low, clear voice, looking down at her impassively.

Telegrams were rare in the quiet Mission station in Siangcheng. Nevertheless, Teacher Dong was not altogether surprised as she listened while the deacon read it aloud to her, still in that low, clear voice:

"Situation serious. Better proceed with baggage to Chowkiakow immediately."

It was the culmination of warning news, that had been coming through during the past few days, of a pending Japanese advance which, if it should materialise, would necessitate a hasty flight to avoid being cut off behind the enemy lines. But that it should come on the first Sunday when services were to be held in the new church compound! The missionary stood quite still for a moment, and then said quietly, "I'd been afraid of this!"

A man standing by asked anxiously what it meant.

"Don't say anything!" said Teacher Dong quickly. "We mustn't let anything disturb them—the first Sunday here!" She turned back to the group with whom she had been talking, and together they walked into the little chapel. The tall deacon turned away, too, impassively. He knew full well what the telegram implied, and he was outwardly unmoved. Three years ago the missionary would have thought he did not care; but she knew him better now, and she was conscious of a wordless understanding between them to avoid any emotional demonstration of grief which would spoil the joy of this day.

The first Sunday service in the new church building commenced. The women, who all had to sit in the back seats, were rather restive. They could not see the preacher without craning their necks, and they were unused to their new surroundings. Teacher Dong sat with them, trying to listen to the sermon, but finding it no easy matter to quieten the conflicting emotions of her heart.

After the service there was a meeting of the Diaconate, and when various problems had been discussed, the tall deacon looked over to the missionary, and asked if she had anything to say, adding quietly, "You had better tell them your news, Teacher."

In as matter-of-fact a voice as possible, she told them. She and Teacher Way must evacuate quickly, acting on instructions from the Mission's Superintendent of the Province. But the instructions only told them to go to Chowkiakow, forty miles away, where were other missionaries, and which was the first stage on the journey that *might* have to be taken, if the Japanese really advanced. The tall deacon added in a reassuringly calm voice that it was probably only for a matter of two or three weeks that the teachers would have to go there, and then they would be able to return. At the Bible Class in the afternoon he maintained the same imperturbable attitude, and succeeded, to some extent, in convincing some that the situation was not overwhelmingly grave, and that the missionaries would almost certainly be returning after two or three weeks absence. Had there not been many such rumours of Japanese advances before?

Nevertheless, as the missionaries went to rest that Sunday night, it was with the conviction in their hearts that the morrow would see the end of their service in the City of Siangcheng. The thought was solemnizing. The books were closing, and it would only remain one day to give account of that which had been committed to them.

CHAPTER II

STEPHEN

THE last day in Siangcheng dawned, and not long after its dawning came Stephen, a man of honest report, to attend to some business. Not that his name was really Stephen, but it seemed to fit him well. He had come now, alert, quietly capable, at Teacher Dong's request, to see to the distribution of the Famine Relief grain. During the four years that she had been in the city, this seller of cloth had been the one she knew could be relied upon to serve tables heartily and ungrudgingly. In fact, he considered it his special ministry, and was far happier when he was bustling around making food for meals at Conference time, or superintending the buying in of grain to be distributed to the needy than when he was standing in the pulpit on Sunday mornings, leading the service. Nevertheless, he did that, too, albeit with occasional protestations that he had not got the gift of preaching, and that now there were others in the church who had, he desired to retire in their favour.

It was surprising that a man of his sanguine, easily-influenced temperament should have remained steadfast and faithful in his witness for the Lord and his service in the church, when others who were naturally steadier and quieter had fluctuated and fallen. The church in Siangcheng had had its ups and downs; but when some of its most prominent and influential members had become lukewarm, or even fallen into open sin, the seller of cloth had gone unwaveringly on; and when, some years previously, there had been almost open opposition to the missionary then in charge of the station because he had disciplined the unruly members, Stephen had been one

of the few to remain loyal, and had patiently borne being jibed over his adherence to the "foreigner." Most of the weight of church responsibility had fallen on his shoulders after that time, and he had done practically everything, from leading the Sunday services to doing the church accounts.

Before his conversion, Stephen had been a man with an extremely bad temper. His wife was terrified of him, and when she saw him coming towards their little home after a business trip, or heard his voice, her heart would thump apprehensively, as she wondered whether or not he was in a good mood; for if he were not, he would find fault with the food, or with her, and would have no compunction at all about giving her a beating. Even after he became a believer, that suspicious, irritable temper was easily aroused. His exhortations might have weight with others, but they failed to move his wife. His repentance towards God and faith towards Jesus Christ had not altered his attitude towards her. She was still the object of his suspicious jealousy and his critical fault-finding.

But that was before he attended the Convention where he had a revelation of himself that brought him down in ashamed penitence before a Holy God—and humble confession before an astonished wife. The Convention was held in a neighbouring city, and Stephen went off to it in glad expectation of having an enjoyable time. Instead, he learnt some unpleasant home-truths, and saw himself as a wolf in sheep's clothing, hiding cruelty, hatred, jealousy under a cloak of apparent godliness. He faced up to facts honestly, and realised that true religion, like charity, must begin at home. When the time approached for him to return, his wife began getting nervous and apprehensive as she usually did when she knew he would soon appear. What would be wrong this time? Of what laziness, or neglect, or worse, would he accuse her? When at last he arrived, however, he entered the house

quietly, spoke gently to her, and then, to her utter amazement, begged her pardon for his former attitude towards her. The bewildered woman did not know what to think of it all, and was uncomfortably afraid that there was a bad "catch" in it somewhere! But as the days and weeks passed by, and her erstwhile bad-tempered, critical, querulous husband continued to be as gentle and uncomplaining as the day on which he returned from the Convention, she began to realize that something really had been effected in his character.

Now it might be expected that this wonderful change would immediately have its repercussions in the heart of Stephen's wife, and that she would be "won by the good conversation of her husband." No doubt, Stephen himself hoped the same; but the reverse was the case. His wife, who for years had been repressed, bullied, scolded, suddenly found herself in a position of power. She started nagging at her husband, and he did not retaliate. She resented his devotion to the "religion" (she only knew it as that), which had so altered him, and when he neglected his cloth-selling business to go to church on Sundays, or to give his time to the managing of some church matters, she taunted him with the question, "Will the Gospel Hall doctrine feed your family?"

Poor Stephen! The tables were turned. He had to tread the painful path of fellowship with One who had endured much contradiction of sinners against Himself, and who, when He was reviled, reviled not again. He learnt to pray for the wife who was doing her best to make his life miserable, instead of beating her. It was a deepening and enriching experience for Stephen, albeit humiliating to endure wordy persecution from one who had lived in awe and trembling of him all their married life.

This state of affairs continued for some time. Then Stephen's wife came under the chastening Hand of God. A very large and painful boil appeared on her leg, and all

her doctoring and any amount of local medicine failed to ease it. Her husband greatly angered her by praying for her, "Lord, she is a sinner! Be merciful to her!" and further irritated her by inviting the Biblewoman and a missionary to come and visit her. This they did with great regularity bringing medicine which certainly eased the pain. Still she did not repent, however, and another boil appeared, even more painful than the first. Days of pain, and the persistent prayer on the part of her husband, eventually broke down her resistance. One evening she prayed to the Lord, promising that if only He would heal her, she would believe, and would also testify for Him on Sunday in the Gospel Hall. The next morning, when she awoke, she found that for the first time the piece of cloth covering her boil was dry, instead of being saturated with pus. In a very short time she was well again and fulfilled her promise to testify to the Lord's goodness in healing. From that time Stephen and his wife were united, and their home became a place of harmony.

Stephen loved exhorting people. Many were the illiterate old women who had come to hear the Gospel preached in chapel because he had first exhorted, and then prayed for them. The more educated churchgoers might find him somewhat tedious, but the common people heard him very gladly when he harangued them kindly, and with the homely illustrations that they so readily understood. He had a true shepherd's heart for the poor of the flock, and he would go to a considerable amount of trouble to obtain help for those who were in distress; he was easily touched by the sorrow and suffering of others, and was always ready to go on any errand that was to bring relief for physical or mental suffering. He was the one to whom the missionaries instinctively turned for help in the managing of any philanthropic project, or, indeed, any matter that called for practical management. He considered it his special work, and, incidentally, rather prided himself on

his knowledge of human nature, and ability to handle men and affairs tactfully. Teacher Dong had often been conscious that she was being dealt with tactfully herself!

Now the four years of fellowship was brought to an abrupt end. There was just one last opportunity for Stephen to relieve the missionary of a responsibility. The Famine Relief grain must all be distributed before she left. Lists of the neediest people were hastily compiled, and Stephen took charge, firmly putting aside his own business until he had seen this thing through. He spoke little that day, and the missionaries were grateful. When the grain had been distributed, he handed in the lists, and said he was returning to his home. "I am going back now," he said. "If there is anything I can do for you, send over at once. I shall not be far away."

The English missionary and the Chinese deacon looked at each other. She wished she had some last word for him. Stephen had told her one day that when Pastor Gee and Pastor Fee left Siangcheng, they both exhorted him in the same words, "Be thou faithful unto death. . . ." It had made a profound impression on him. She wished now that she had some word for him, too. But somehow, words did not come easily just then.

"If there is anything I can do for you, send over at once," he had said. "I shall not be far away." She looked at him, and knew he meant it. He would be ready for any call, and she knew he would do what he could. After four years of fellowship in the bonds of the Gospel, there was no need for further words, perhaps.

"Thank you," she said. He bowed, and went away.

CHAPTER III

". . . OF GOOD REPORT"

STEPHEN did not come alone to manage the distribution of the Famine Relief grain. Another man came with him, slightly taller than he, with a longish, rather melancholy face, a man who spoke little, except on the rare occasions when he got excited. The missionary had known him for years as one of the most regular attendants at the Sunday and week-day services. He was one whose life seemed to be bound very closely to the little church, and if the benches needed to be arranged, or the preaching chapel to be swept, as likely as not he would be the one to set things right. He had been a deacon for years, and attended the deacons' meetings with greater regularity than anybody; his contribution to the meetings, however, usually stopped there, for it was exceedingly difficult to elicit an opinion of any sort from him. When any matter was being discussed, he would sit with his head down, and his eyes on the ground, and when eventually a vote was taken, his almost invariable answer to any question was "I follow," from which it was concluded that he agreed with the majority. On one occasion it was pointed out to him, with slightly amused asperity, that he couldn't follow two points of view; in this particular case, who or what was he following? "I follow the Lord," he replied; which pious pronouncement, while failing to help towards a decision, proved unanswerable!

It was not, however, only his quietness that gave him a reputation for being a man of integrity. He was well-known to be honest, and, as such, was elected to a civic position in which honesty was almost impossible! Under the Chinese system of local government, every ten

families are grouped together under the headship of one man, elected by themselves. This man is responsible for the good conduct and maintaining the peace of these ten families—a position which is no sinecure! Mr. Fan, whose financial circumstances were sufficiently comfortable to make it unnecessary for him to do any work other than look after a bit of property which pertained to his family, had sufficient spare time on his hands to be able to fulfil the obligations of such a position. To maintain the peace between ten families in China, without resorting to the lies and deception that are considered quite legitimate, is practically an impossibility, and as Mr. Fan progressed in the Christian faith, he found his position more and more difficult. He wanted to be freed from this responsibility, which he found he could not fulfil without resorting to methods which injured his conscience.

On one occasion, when a deacons' meeting was in progress, he was called away to settle some dispute. He had to go; they all recognized that. "The Lord give you the right words to speak!" said the tall deacon, himself a wizard with words, kindly. Mr. Fan was already hurrying towards the door, but he paused to make one revealing remark. "The words of truth are the right words," he said. For a man with such an ideal before him, this civic position was becoming intolerable, and after some weeks the missionaries were rejoiced to hear that Mr. Fan would now have more time to give to church matters, for he was no longer the headman over ten families.

Mr. Fan himself, however, was not happy. He still had something on his conscience, and one evening, at the close of the "lamplight service," he stood up and asked for prayer. The two or three little oil lamps on the long table cast only a dim, flickering light on the small group of men and women who had gathered in the dark, narrow prayer room, as they all looked towards the speaker.

"I have sinned," he said simply. There was an almost breathless silence at this confession, which was obviously not easily made. "I have got out of the position of headman," continued Mr. Fan. "But I told lies to get out of it, and I know that was sin." Immediately a comforting murmur arose from the men and women gathered around the table. "That's not sin," said one man reassuringly. "You had to get out of the position, for you had to tell lies all the time you were in it." But Mr. Fan was still not happy. He looked at Teacher Dong, who had remained silent. She did not know what to say, for she realized that she was face to face with a problem that easy words could not solve. "What does the teacher say?" asked Mr. Fan, still looking at her.

"We ought not to tell lies," she said slowly. She longed to comfort him, for he was manifestly unhappy; but it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

"But if he didn't tell lies, he'd never get out of the position," volunteered someone. "And while he's in that position, he has to be telling lies all the time."

"Yes," admitted the missionary, perplexed. The lies had been told, anyway, and there seemed no way back. There was, however, one way of sure peace, as there always is for the penitent. "The Lord has said that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness," said Teacher Dong. "Shall we pray about it?" So they prayed, claiming the promise, and the matter was referred to no more.

Many efforts had been made to induce Mr. Fan to lead Sunday services, but they had all failed. On a few occasions he had been persuaded to lead the prayer meeting that preceded it, but as this had usually consisted of announcing a couple of hymns, and reading a passage of Scripture, and then asking for prayers, it had not called for any powers of oratory. The very effort of standing up

before a hundred or so people, all of whom were directing their gaze upon him, was almost too much for him, however, and he was always only too ready to retire in favour of more confident spirits. It was, therefore, the more surprising that he was always ready to take his stand in supporting open-air workers. At this he excelled. He would lead the singing, invite passers-by to come and listen to the doctrine, give out tracts, and engage people in personal conversation without any trace of the embarrassment he evidently felt when standing on the platform. And on one memorable occasion, when there was an unexpected breakdown in the preaching at the open-air meeting, he surprised and delighted those who knew him by stepping into the breach and speaking for about twenty minutes in a most convincing manner, presenting his arguments as though they had been well thought out and prepared beforehand. Such an excellent beginning promised well for the future; but Mr. Fan retired once more into his shell, declared that he could not do it again, and refused to have his name put down on the list of speakers.

Although he himself, since his conversion, appeared to have lived a straightforward life, going steadily on, he had, nevertheless, a heart of compassion for the ignorant, and for them that were out of the way. It had been found necessary to discipline one very old member of the church who had weakly countenanced his daughter's looseness of moral behaviour. Mr. Fan was particularly fearful lest this discipline should prove too much of a discouragement for the old man, and made it his business to seek him out, and strengthen his hands in the Lord. He came to Teacher Dong one day to report a conversation.

"Mr. Yen seemed very ashamed," he said. "And feels that we don't want anything to do with him. So I comforted him, and said, 'No, it's not that, Mr. Yen. You see, we are all brethren. Now, if you go out on the street with

some dirt on your face, people will just laugh at you behind your back, but no one will tell you about it. But we are all one family, and because of that, when we see you with dirt on your face, we tell you, so that you can wash it off. You wash it off, and then no one laughs at you.' The Lord certainly helped me to think of that illustration," he added, when the missionary commended him on his tactful handling of the subject. "We want to help these people, lest they go right away," he said. "I am worried about them." He might be nervous about standing on platforms, and addressing big crowds, but he was in his element when talking quietly to ones or twos, or seeking to lead a wanderer back into the way.

Like Stephen, he was willing to serve tables, although he lacked the quick initiative of the older man; he was a younger Christian, too, and a certain covetousness of which he himself was not yet aware, sometimes prevented in order to serve those tables wholeheartedly. On this, the missionaries' last day in Siangcheng, he came in his the missionaries' last day in Neck City, he came in his usual quiet, willing way, and, with Stephen, saw to the distribution of the Famine Relief grain; but when Stephen went away, Mr. Fan remained on, to see the household belongings and the clothes that the missionaries were selling to raise money for the possibly long and expensive journey that lay before them, and to try to obtain some of them as cheaply as possible. Does it seem disappointingly mercenary? Rome was not built in a day. Neither is our salvation from every open and secret clinging sin, finished in a day, or in a year. But Jesus, whose Name means Saviour is saving those who come unto God by Him, and He will perfect that which concerneth Mr. Fan, the deacon in the church of Siangcheng; and every other weak, frail creature of dust who calls upon His Name; even the missionaries, who so often realize themselves to be the weakest, frailest of them all.

CHAPTER IV

"THROUGH FAITH . . . MADE STRONG"

"TEACHER! How much do you want for this?"

The missionary turned her attention from the Famine Relief distribution to the woman who was undertaking the somewhat ticklish task of selling off the personal effects that the missionaries knew they could not take with them. She stood now, alert, business-like, strong. The missionary looked at her with a sense of relief. Here was one on whom she could rely to see her through the practical problems of obtaining conveyances, and selling stuff to raise money for the journey that lay ahead. She had come with the express purpose of helping the missionaries, and if Mrs. Deng undertook a job, she would see it through.

It was nearly three years ago that Teacher Dong had first seen her. It was a very hot August day, about noon, and with her fellow missionary she was cycling along a rough, narrow path, feeling extremely sorry for herself at the weariness she was suffering in the dusty heat, when she saw, coming towards her over a ridge ahead, a family of flood refugees. A sun-darkened man was pushing a heavily-laden wheelbarrow on which lay a naked sleeping child, while a strong-faced, high cheek-boned woman pulled sturdily. As they saw the two cyclists approaching, the faces of both the man and the woman lit up, and Teacher Dong has a vague recollection of having seen the man somewhere before.

"Aren't you Teacher Dong?" he asked, smiling at her.

"Yes," she answered. "Where are you from?"

"I'm from Taikang," said the man.

"Taikang!" ejaculated Teacher Dong, delightedly. The city away over in the Japanese-occupied territory, where she had spent nearly a year, as a very new, inarticulate missionary, amongst a people who had taken her right into their hearts. She plied the travellers with questions, and elicited the information from them that, like many others from that district, they had been forced to flee before the encroaching waters of the Yellow River, whose banks had been broken that the resulting floods might stay any further Japanese advances into the province. So Mr. and Mrs. Deng and their small daughter, with their son and his wife, had salved what they could from the little home that was partially ruined, and, leaving their old mother and one brother behind to eke out a precarious living on what remained, had come forth into the unknown. And having heard that conditions in the County of Siangcheng were fairly prosperous, had decided to go there to see if they could find some place of ref ge and means of livelihood. They were happy and full of praise to the Lord for the provision He had made for them on their journey, and when offered a little money, they were reluctant to accept it, for the Lord, they said, had given them sufficient. As the missionaries remounted their bicycles, leaving the refugees to trudge away over the flat, dusty, bumpy road, it was with the consciousness of having been refreshed and unconsciously rebuked by the cheerful spirit of praise manifested by this humble couple who had suffered so much.

The Deng family came to live in the vicinity of Siangcheng, and after some moves finally established themselves in a small lean-to shack, composed mainly of mud and rushes, built up against the rather more substantial home of a Christian woman in a small village just outside the city. Mr. Deng earned some money as a wheelbarrow coolie, and often took up his pitch outside the Gospel Hall, waiting for people to hire him, while Mrs. Deng, a basket

over one arm, and carrying her little girl in the other, trudged around the city streets, and out into the country villages, selling needles, or cutting out paper patterns for embroidering shoes, in exchange for which she would be given a few coppers or some food.

Although Mr. Deng was a baptized Church member, Mrs. Deng still ranked as an "enquirer." In fact, it was not until the floods turned her out of her home, and she had to face a future that was even more uncertain than it had been when she had lived in what was, though poor, a certain dwelling-place, that she had come into any really vital relationship with the Lord.

When her mother-in-law and her husband had gone off to church on Sundays, she had been perfectly content to remain at home and work on—in fact, she preferred it. And although she had a catechism, and occasionally made some sort of effort to learn to read it, she never got very far. She was a cheerful, sociable sort of soul, and found it far more attractive to talk to people, and learn to sing choruses, than to pore over complicated characters. Now that she was thrust out of the quiet security of her home, and the uncertainty of life forced her to turn whole-heartedly to the Lord, she had a real desire to learn to read; but there was no time. She had to be out all day, hawking her cheap wares, to help swell the lean family exchequer, and by the time she returned at evening she was too tired to learn—even if her husband had not been too tired to teach her, and oil too expensive to burn!

When the crops failed in 1942, it was the poor of the land who felt the pinch first, and they were suffering in their quiet, patient way long before the acuteness of the food shortage was being felt by all. Quite early in the famine Mr. Deng found that there were not so many people to hire him and his barrow, and often he would return home in the evening, having earned nothing all

day. But he had to eat: how can a man work if he does not eat? Barrow-pushing is hard work.

The burden of providing food fell all the heavier on Mrs. Deng; and when there really was not sufficient, her appetite became unaccountably small. But in spite of all her efforts and sacrifices, the food just was not enough, and Mr. Deng got thinner and weaker, and eventually became really ill. One day he dragged himself to the Gospel Hall, and lay in the preaching chapel at the front, evidently a really sick man. What he needed was not medicine, but careful feeding, and he remained there for some weeks, eventually recovering sufficient strength to return home.

The famine increased in severity. As the missionaries walked down the streets, the snatches of conversation that they heard all seemed to refer to it. "How can we get through?" "Can we ever live through it?" "We've no grain left. . . ." The number of beggars increased on the streets, and their constant complaint was that they "couldn't beg the food out of people." Hearing that conditions were somewhat better down south, and having a sister there, the Dengs decided that Mr. Deng should go to her, in the hope that he could be kept alive until the famine was over, while Mrs. Deng remained on with her daughter-in-law and small daughter, to beg her way through. She could manage, she asserted. She could get enough by begging, and hawking, to get bread for the child, her daughter-in-law could get employment as a servant, and she herself could get along just living on boiled weeds and vegetables if necessary. So she faced the bitter months that lay ahead of her.

Each day saw her setting out for the country, carrying her two-year-old child in one arm, and her big basket on the other. As she approached each village, she stopped for a few moments, to pray, then went on in her cheerful way to hawk her goods. Each morning, early, she made her

way first of all to the Gospel Hall, where bowls of gruel were served out to those who were in the direst need. One bowl of hot gruel is better than nothing—and sometimes the day brought nothing else for Mrs. Deng. Odd scraps of bread are precious in famine time. It was no unusual thing for her to return home in the evening, as the moon was rising, with nothing in her basket but some weeds, and odd bits of cabbage leaves or carrot tops, and pieces of stick and straw she had gathered to make the fire whereon to boil her vegetable stew. Sometimes she was so weary that she would sit down on one of the graves by the side of the road, and sing a chorus or two, to keep her courage up.

"Who's that?" enquired a passerby on one occasion.

"A beggar," replied Mrs. Deng.

"A beggar! Singing like that! Must have gone mad!" said the man, passing on.

Once a soldier accosted her angrily, as he saw her sitting by the roadside in the darkening twilight. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"A beggar," she replied.

Something had evidently enraged him, and here was an object on which to vent his wrath, one who could easily be intimidated. "Can't do better than shoot you!" he said, in a tone of voice that would certainly have terrorised some beggars—for, after all, who would be likely to do anything to save a beggar?

But Mrs. Deng replied, with cheerful fearlessness, "Praise the Lord! I've begged long enough!" His anger abated before her cheerfulness, and he laughed and went on.

The famine had reached its height when a new responsibility was added to Mrs. Deng's already heavy burden. An aunt of hers, also a refugee from the flooded Taikang county, found her way to her, in a state of collapse from hunger, and Mrs. Deng now had to feed her as well as

her own child and her daughter-in-law. Added to this, her husband returned. He had been to his sister, but found conditions with her nearly as bad as those he had left, so he had begged his way back to his home in Taikang. On arrival there, he found his mother actually prostrate from hunger, and he had hastened back to Siangcheng as quickly as his weakened state would allow him, to fetch his wife and family. Now Mrs. Deng was torn two ways. She dearly loved her mother-in-law, and was as distressed as her optimistic spirit would allow her to be at the possibility of her dying before she could reach her. On the other hand, to return home would be to leave her aunt to certain death.

At this juncture, a way of escape was opened for her—by the aunt herself. She had some clothes, necessary for her if she lived, but not if she died. Now the poor woman had been starving for months, and she was craving for some tasty, satisfying food, which her niece was unable to provide. She thought of her clothes. Why not sell them, and spend the money on buying some of that tasty, satisfying food for which her whole being seemed to crave? She had no desire to live, and she herself knew there was very little chance of her recovery. It would, almost inevitably, be fatal if she did eat a good meal. Many, many were the people who died through over-eating after a long period of the semi-starvation of the famine months. But she was almost sure to die, anyway, and as the woman lay on the floor, with her poor rags around her, it seemed so much more preferable to die *satisfied.* So she suggested to her niece that her clothes and bedding should be sold, and the money spent on one good meal.

Mrs. Deng knew what it would mean. Certain death. Well, she was going to die, anyway, but she might still linger for days, even weeks, and in the meantime Mr. Deng was impatiently urging that she depart immediately, in

order to minister to his mother, and also to be home in time for the harvest that was ripening fast. By complying with the dying woman's request, the release of death would be hastened, and Mrs. Deng would be free to return home. But Mrs. Deng had one fear, which seemed to dominate all her relationships. She feared to sear her conscience.

"Our Gospel Hall people won't let us eat too much," she said vigorously, in answer to her aunt's suggestion. What the Gospel Hall people said was as the Voice of God to the honest, illiterate beggar woman, and their practical warnings were heeded as much as their spiritual ones. "They're always warning us against it."

Her husband had brought back more bad news, which greatly affected Mrs. Deng. Her own mother was ill, from under-nourishment, and her brother had already sold his wife in order to get money for food. The woman herself had gone voluntarily, for she knew the hopelessness of the situation. But Mrs. Deng was in tears as she told the missionary, overwhelmed with sympathy for the sister-in-law, who had gone away, leaving behind a small child. "What must she have been feeling like in her heart as she went off?" she asked.

"Now, what ought I do to?" she puzzled. "Ought I to go back home, and leave my aunt here? But if I do that, I feel I shall be searing my conscience." It was another of the many cases in which there seemed nothing to do but to resort to prayer. Mrs. Deng's prayer was voluble but forceful. "Lord, you know that I cannot but follow Thee, whether I live hungry, or die hungry. . . ."

Yet another burden was placed on her. A young woman and her two children, also refugees from Taikang, had become separated from the rest of their family, who were making their way back home in the hope that there might be some harvest to reap from the parts of land that were not submerged by the floods. Not knowing where to go, she had made her way to Mrs. Deng's small lean-to. And

Mrs. Deng had taken her in, in her usual cheerful, vigorous way, and when her husband objected that they already had troubles enough of their own, overcame his objections by demanding how they could turn out a helpless woman with two children without searing their consciences? He insisted that they must leave her aunt, and return to Taikang, and she asserted that, at any rate, they must take the mother and two children with them, even if she did have to leave her aunt to her fate. Her husband argued that if they did so, it would mean leaving some of their own precious belongings behind them, in order to make room on the wheelbarrow for the children, who would not be able to walk. But how, reasoned Mrs. Deng with her voluble forcefulness, leave them behind without searing their consciences?

Life was becoming perplexingly complicated, as she was torn between conflicting duties; and all the time there was the continual strain of gathering sufficient weeds and vegetables, and begging stale bits of bread sufficient, not to satisfy, but to maintain life. So many had died already. But Mrs. Deng, although she was getting gaunter and gaunter, her high cheek-bones standing out of a face that had weeks ago lost its erstwhile firm plumpness, seemed invested with a supernatural strength, and continued carrying around her fretful child, and big basket, spending the whole day begging. And when she could not beg more than enough bread to keep the child from whining too much, she praised the Lord that He made the bowl of gruel that she had each morning sufficient to strengthen her throughout the whole day.

The same Lord saw to it that the perplexity caused by the conflicting duties did not lead her to despair; for in the early hours of the day before it was decided that the family should set out on their trek back to Taikang, her aunt died, and she and her husband buried her. She went the same day to say goodbye to the missionaries, and

prayed with them at great length, interjecting short, cajoling remarks to her little girl, who was restless. She returned twice more, however, before she finally set out on her journey, and declared that she would return after harvest, for she had become attached to Siangcheng, and the Gospel Hall people, and all the old ladies to whose homes she had gone begging during the famine!

She was as good as her word. Some months later she turned up again, with her husband, her little girl, and her old mother-in-law. The harvest had yielded them practically nothing, and they returned, not very much better off than when they left. Her old mother-in-law was in poor health, and the journey had proved trying. To Mrs. Deng's sorrow, she died just a few days after she arrived; and what hurt her as much, she was unable to provide a coffin, and the loved dead body was wrapped up in a rush mat and, after a little service, buried.

Then her husband over-strained himself one day, when pushing a heavily-laden barrow over a long, muddy road. He lay at home prostrated with pain and moaning. Once more the burden of supporting the family fell upon Mrs. Deng. But God answered prayer, and he didn't die, and by the time the Japanese invasion was threatening, he was on the way, though slowly, to recovery.

"Don't be afraid," said Mrs. Deng to Teacher Dong and the Biblewoman, as they sat discussing the possibility of invasion. The Biblewoman, who was alone in the world except for her fifteen-year-old daughter, was unusually perturbed as she looked into the future. "Don't be afraid. There is nothing that can't be gone through." She spoke with the calm cheerfulness of experience. "There is nothing that can't be gone through. Look at what the Lord has brought me through. . . ." The missionary looked at her, and remembered what the Lord had brought her through. "It'll be all right."

And now, she stood before Teacher Dong again, ready

to help, to stand by, to do what there was she could do. She did not know what it meant to the missionaries to have her that day. They knew she would see through what she undertook to do. She found the barrows that were to convey the luggage to Chowkiakow. She took out articles of clothing, and crockery, and picture frames, to sell to the houses where she was wont to beg, tenaciously determined to get the very best prices she could! And in the rush and bustle, and emotional strain of that day, the missionaries looked at the beggar-woman who through faith had been made strong—and they were strengthened.

CHAPTER V

"THOU HAST LIEN AMONG THE POTS"

"PLEASE, Teacher, have you time to come and eat your breakfast now?" asked Sister Lee in a restrained, concerned voice. The missionary turned and looked for a moment at the flat-faced serving woman who stood before her; one of God's best gifts to her.

It was over three years ago that this one whose chief ministry it was to serve had rejoined her after a separation of more than a year. She had arrived one Sunday after Christmas, unannounced and unexpected, having made a dangerous journey from Japanese occupied territory, through No Man's Land, and across the water of the Yellow River. No one on the church compound at Siangcheng knew her when she arrived, of course, and when she told them she was from Taikang, and had come to see Teacher Dong, it apparently did not occur to any of the men or women who were gathering for the Christian Endeavour meeting to inform the missionaries of her arrival. So when Teacher Dong entered the rather dark little room in which the meeting was to be held, she was utterly unprepared when an inconspicuous little woman, dressed in the usual coarse dark blue clothes of the Honan peasant, rose quickly to her feet, and said in a voice of suppressed emotion, "Teacher!"

For a few seconds the missionary gazed at her, unable to remember who this rather dumpy woman, with the careworn face that was so strangely familiar, could be. Then, with a gasp of astonished delight, she recognized the woman who had served her so faithfully for the few months before she, together with three fellow missionaries, had been politely but firmly forced by the Japanese to leave their inland station and proceed to Shanghai. Her

last sight of Sister Lee had been to see her standing in the muddy roadway, crying unrestrainedly, quite oblivious of the interested onlookers, as she watched the piled-up horse wagon, on which sat the one to whom she looked as her "mistress," go lumbering along the uneven road towards the city gate. And now, here she was in Siangcheng, having travelled alone farther than she had ever gone before, across really dangerous country, with the quiet conviction that it was the Lord's will for her to go and work for Teacher Dong again, and that, therefore, He would take her through. And, of course, He had done so, and in such a way that the heathen barrow-man who had wheeled her and her few belongings was awed at the strange way in which this unimportant little peasant woman seemed to get through situations, and past the imperious soldiers who were hindering other travellers.

Sister Lee's arrival at the Mission station in Siangcheng was the beginning of the release of the missionaries from the nagging strain of servant problems. Here was one who willingly and cheerfully did anything that came to hand, and made no veiled requests for higher wages. As the months went by, and the financial straitness which brought the missionaries so much closer to the people made it necessary for them to reduce household expenses, Sister Lee shouldered more and more work, going out every morning to do the marketing, getting the breakfast, taking the goats out to graze, milking and tending them, hurrying back in time to help her mistress get the dinner, sweeping the courtyard, and trying to find time to do the mending.

Emergencies found her unmoved. On two occasions rumours of a Japanese advance made hasty evacuations necessary. In the midst of feverish packing, hurried arrangements for obtaining transport, coming and going of excited newsmongers, Sister Lee continued her imperturbable way, preparing meals, looking after the goats,

executing the sometimes excited orders issued by her not so imperturbable mistress. And when the time came for departure, she set off calmly with the wheelbarrow man, as they pushed the missionaries' bags and boxes, leading the goats which were her special charge, and very precious, as they produced the only milk obtainable to add to the missionaries' tea! When the goats were in milk, of course, the missionaries got more than enough for their tea, and had cream for their bread as well—and great was the delight of their serving woman when she could come back from the milking with a bowl full of rich milk.

When the missionaries took a little blind four-year-old girl into their home from the local workhouse, where she was so neglected that there seemed little chance of her living, it was Sister Lee who had gladly consented to look after the helpless, untrained child, and for weeks she did so, having her to sleep in her room, preparing her food and lovingly feeding her; and when at last arrangements were made for the child to go to an orphanage and the question arose as to who should escort her there, it was Sister Lee who undertook to take the journey of hundreds of miles across the hot, dusty plain, and take the little one to the aged Swedish missionary who, years ago, had opened her house and her heart to motherless and fatherless, deaf, blind, maimed children who would otherwise have perished.

Never before had the little serving woman even contemplated such a journey as this one, which involved not only many weary days of sitting on a wheelbarrow under a blazing sun, bumping over uneven roads, but also travelling in a train; and Sister Lee had never even seen a railway in all her life! But she did not hesitate to face what was, to her, a most formidable task, for her quiet faith in God assured her that He would go before her. And when, after some weeks, she returned, having taken little blind Peace to the orphanage, she was full of praise to

Him for the way He had provided help for her all the way along the road.

Through the hard days of the famine she had continued uncomplaining, deliberately choosing the coarsest bread for herself, in order that the missionaries she served might have the whiter flour; cheerfully eating steamed weeds, which she went out to the fields to pick; going out to investigate the conditions of some of the beggars that Teacher Dong and Teacher Way saw on the streets, and whom they desired to help, and never failing to speak to them, with an almost tense earnestness, of the One who had died to save them.

For three years Sister Lee had served the missionaries; she had cooked their meals, planned and practised economy when it became necessary, borne the many little burdens of housekeeping, house-cleaning, looking after the goats, grinding the corn; the small, monotonous, nagging tasks of one called upon to tarry at home. She had not been absolutely perfect, of course. She was infinitely more concerned with godliness than cleanliness, and Teacher Dong, who had found that the effort to cultivate cleanliness in a smoky Chinese kitchen was a distinct strain on godliness, had long since given up making any serious efforts to persuade Sister Lee to combine the two! Even now, as she stood before her mistress, anxiously enquiring whether the teacher had time to eat her breakfast now, her hair was wry, and her clothes rather grimy. But she had one more day left in which to serve, and her task was to see that the missionaries' bodily needs were cared for; for how could they get through all the pressing claims of this tremendous day if they did not eat?

For one moment Teacher Dong was conscious of a tender, intimate love towards this little woman, a oneness that went deeper than words. She had been part of her very life during those three years. If she stopped to think, a whole volume of memories would come surging up;

Sister Lee bringing the bowl of glowing charcoal into the little sitting-room, with its plastered, yellow walls, and its rush mats, as the missionaries settled down to their evening meal on cold winter evenings; Sister Lee returning from market, her face flushed, her basket filled with vegetables, fruit, eggs; Sister Lee hastening forward with eager delight to greet her on her return from a visit to an outstation; Sister Lee in church service, her eyes fixed on the preacher, solemnly listening to every word; Sister Lee praying, slowly, deliberately, intensely, framing her petitions as one who knows the fear of the Lord; Sister Lee in the kitchen surrounded with dirty dishes and saucepans, placed about in a haphazard and unmethodical manner, her hair awry and a smudge on her face, producing a quite tasty meal out of the chaos. . . .

But there was too much to be done to-day to allow that volume of memories to surge up. Teacher Dong smiled at Sister Lee, and nodded.

"I'm just coming," she said.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLIND SEE

BREAKFAST was barely over when Sister Lee appeared again, and, speaking in the voice of one who is suppressing deep emotion, said:

"Teacher, Joy would like to speak to you."

"Oh, has she come? Praise the Lord! Do bring her in!" said Teacher Dong quickly, then, thankful that one whom she greatly desired to see once more had come, ran out herself to greet the visitor.

Out in the sunny, well-swept courtyard, under a leafless tree, sat a blind girl. Her head was bound round with a small, rather dirty white towel; her jacket and trousers were of the usual faded, coarse blue cloth of the Chinese peasant. She had a basket at her side, in which were several pounds of grain, just received from the Famine Relief distribution, and a stick, indispensable to the sightless. The lids were closed in the deep hollows of the sunken eyes, and on her rounded, childish face was that strange expression of peaceful, almost cheerfully patient resignation peculiar to the blind.

It was nearly four years ago that Teacher Dong and the Biblewoman had first visited the local workhouse, where the blind girl lived. On sunny days the large, square courtyard of hard bare earth, kept reasonably tidy and well swept, was not an unpleasant place for the few old or maimed inmates to lie around in. The low buildings in which they lived were dismal and dark, though. The only light came through the open doors or glassless window frames of heavy wood. The only beds provided were the bricks, and mattresses of wheat stalk bound together with coarse string. The two messengers of

the Cross sat down on two low stools in the room reserved for the women, and looked at the dreary group of old women assembled there, short-sighted or half-blind most of them, sitting or lying aimlessly on their bundles of ragged, dirty bed-clothes. They were received with polite though somewhat apathetic interest, and their compassion was so aroused by these pathetic old people that they scarcely noticed the little group of children gathered in the doorway, who had come to see the two strangers, and listen to the choruses they sang and the stories they told.

Amongst that group of children came a blind girl of about twelve. She did not appear particularly interested, listening for a while, and then wandering off. Sometimes she did not come at all. She was married to a blind fortune-teller, about thirty years her senior, and together they trudged, stick in hand, carefully tapping the ground before them, out to the country, and were often away for days, sometimes weeks, earning their food by casting horoscopes and telling fortunes, sleeping at nights in outhouses, or wherever they could find a sheltered spot in which to lie.

The plight of the workhouse inmates was a pitiable one, and the little blind girl attracted the attention of the missionary and the Biblewoman no more than anyone else, particularly as she usually wandered away before they had an opportunity of speaking to her. When, therefore, they were sitting chatting to an old woman one day, urging her to accept the Lord, they were astonished when the girl broke in with a word of personal testimony. They had been promising peace of heart to the old woman if only she would believe in Jesus, and suddenly the girl said:

"Yes, since I believed, my heart has had no affairs at all!"—her quaint way of expressing her freedom from a fretted state of mind.

"Why, when did you believe?" asked Teacher Dong,

turning to her, scarcely knowing whether she had heard aright.

"I believed in the twelfth month," said the girl without hesitation.

"Why did you believe?" enquired the missionary, interested at this unexpected profession of faith. "Was it because Mr. Lee exhorted you?" Mr. Lee was one of the inmates of the workhouse, who had been led to the Lord about two years previously by the Biblewoman, and he was very faithful in witnessing.

"Mr. Lee exhorted me, and you two came and exhorted me, and I believed," said the girl simply.

From that time on, Joy, as they named her, was a frequent visitor to the Gospel Hall, and became especially loved. There were very few Sundays when she did not come to the morning service, led by an undersized child from the workhouse, whose own father was blind, and who clung to Joy almost as a child to a mother, for the girl had a certain strength of character, and resourcefulness far beyond her years, which inspired the confidence of the motherless child.

When she had tasted in some degree the joys of Christian fellowship, and could say with the Psalmist, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go up to the house of the Lord," she kept careful record of the days of the week, in order that she should not miss Sunday. When she and her husband went off on their begging and fortune-telling trips, and it was impossible for her to attend church services, she always remembered when it was Sunday, and somehow observed it as a special day by having special prayer. And as the trip drew to a close, she would hurry her husband up, insisting that they must reach the city before Sunday, in order that she could go to worship.

The name of Joy was certainly one that suited her, for after her conversion that gift of the Spirit, more than any other, was evident in her life. Her rounded, youthful face

lit up when she was spoken to, and when the missionary and the Biblewoman paid their weekly visit to the workhouse she would come running across the familiar courtyard, with heavy, "goose-step" strides, to greet them joyously, laughing heartily at her own clumsy running. She learned quickly, having a good memory, although the irregular, vagabond life she lived made it difficult for her to concentrate for any length of time, and she enjoyed crooning choruses better than repeating Scripture verses. But her prayers revealed a surprisingly well-ordered and balanced mind. Without any of the emotional extravagances that might have been expected from one with such an undisciplined background as hers, she combined thanksgiving with intelligent intercessions, naming individually a number of people known to her, and almost invariably finishing up with a general petition for comfort for those who were sorrowing, provision for those who were in need, and healing for those who were sick.

Early in her Christian life she learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive. When, at the Sunday services, special contributions were invited for evangelistic efforts, for the new church building, or other purposes, it was no unusual thing for the blind girl to make her little subscription. Yet, although she was in specially tender favour with the missionaries, she never took advantage of it to beg anything of them. She had a quiet self-respect which not only prevented her from making an advantageous parade of an affliction which, more than any other stirs up pity, but she managed, in spite of it, to keep herself surprisingly neat and clean—no easy task for an ordinary beggar, much less for a blind one.

Although her husband treated her very indulgently, poor little Joy hated having to live with this man so much older than herself, and sometimes wept from sheer distaste of him. When, therefore, he became ill, and finally died, it was a relief to her to be able to leave the men's room

in the workhouse, where the brick bed she had shared with her elderly husband was the only "home" she knew, and move into the women's room. She felt very free and happy then, and was able to find her way alone round to the Gospel Hall whenever she felt so inclined.

The famine that was just beginning was early felt in the workhouse, and rumours were going around that some of the inmates were to be turned out. Joy was afraid she would be one of them; and just about that time an offer of marriage was made to her. A poor couple living some distance from the city had a blind son of about twenty-two and wanted to find a wife for him. The prospects of a blind beggar are not such as to attract even the most poverty-stricken, and the parents were, therefore, glad enough when they heard, through an old woman who had come to live in the workhouse, of Joy. Their cupidity was aroused when they learned that her ex-husband had taught her to tell fortunes, and that the girl was intelligent, and would be able to earn enough money as a vagabond fortune-teller to add considerably to the family exchequer.

Why Joy made the decision and all the arrangements for the marriage without consulting those whom she had come to trust at the Gospel Hall is hard to explain. True, the missionaries went away for a holiday before the final arrangements were made, but the Chinese Biblewoman, with whom Joy was wont to entrust any money she had and who had helped her in many ways, was still at home, and Joy could have gone to her. It is possible that she had the uneasy feeling that this marriage, which to her seemed a way of security from the apparent uncertainty of her present life, would not be approved. There had been a noticeable change in her attitude lately—a lack of the spontaneous joy that had so characterized her, and a lack of responsiveness to spiritual things, although she still attended Sunday services fairly regularly. Something was

dulling her spiritual life; there was a leakage and a weakening somewhere. Relying on her own wisdom, she agreed to the marriage, and when the missionaries returned from their holiday it was to hear that Joy had left the workhouse, married into a heathen family living somewhere in the country, and had not been seen for weeks.

"Reach people through God." There seemed no other way of reaching her now, except by prayer; but that way was not in vain. One day Joy arrived at the Gospel Hall. She had found her way in alone, carefully trudging along the narrow little footpaths, sometimes with deep ditches on either side, tapping the ground before her at each step she took.

She was unhappy. The old joy seemed to have been crushed out of her. Life in that heathen home was very different from the old, free life in the workhouse, where, in spite of poverty, hardship and discomfort, there was liberty, and on the whole, a friendly spirit. Her mother-in-law was a bad-tempered woman, whose sharp tongue continually flayed with angry words the blind wife of her blind son. Joy was not allowed to sing the choruses she so enjoyed crooning, and only dared to pray in secret. Moreover, she was sent out fortune-telling, often having to be away from home for days at a time. She was thoroughly forlorn. Poor little Joy! It was a very disconsolate and chastened girl that poured out her tale of woe; and there was so little that could be done to help her! She was married, and bound to her husband as long as he lived. She stayed at the Gospel Hall for a few days, and the bruised spirit was eased in an atmosphere of affection, and strengthened with spiritual food. In the following months she found her way in more than once, to spend a few days there. But in the end she always had to return to the place that was home in name only.

As so often happens, loneliness and an unsympathetic atmosphere threw her back upon the Lord. Joy was of a

practical disposition, not much given to mysticism. Her prayers were intelligent, definite, and showed a real spiritual depth and insight, but when she had finished praying, she had finished—and when there was nothing to pray about, she did not pray! On one occasion, a woman suggested that they should go and pray, and Joy said, "But I don't want anything! What is there to pray about?"

She was, however, becoming sensitive to sin, a sure sign of real spirituality. When the Chinese New Year came, that time when idolatry has full sway, Joy was determined that she would not worship the false gods, even though by refusing to do so she might incur the wrath of her mother-in-law and would surely have to forgo eating the tasty food that even the poorest people manage to prepare for this special occasion. So, on the morning of the day which the Chinese make as festive an occasion as we make Christmas, Joy stayed in bed. The crackers went off before dawn, the family arose, there were sounds of fires being lighted, savoury smells came from kitchens, happy voices were heard talking in neighbours' courtyards. But Joy refused to get up, asserting she was sleepy. So she went without her tasty food, and missed the revelry of New Year, because to take part would have meant worshipping gods that are no gods. And the God that taketh pleasure in them that fear Him saw the loyalty of the little blind girl in her darkness and loneliness, when no human eye saw, and He tempered the wind for her. Her mother-in-law was not enraged. She merely ignored the girl on this occasion, at any rate, and made no serious attempt to persecute her.

But Joy was facing a subtle temptation which she found it much harder to overcome than that of idolatry. Her previous husband had taught her the formulæ of fortune-telling, and to one of her bright, volatile temperament, it presented an opportunity to exercise her quick wits and

imagination, besides giving her a power over others which she could not otherwise obtain, that she found it hard indeed to resist. In addition, this was the one and only way open to her to earn money, the possession of which would give her a degree of independence. Try to put yourself into her position. Blind, penniless, dependent on the unloved and unloving, ignored; and then think what it would mean to be in possession of a means of livelihood, the acknowledged means employed by blind beggars in China, the legitimate means—opening up the possibility of some degree of independence, an outlet for imagination and the use of quick wits which otherwise would stagnate, an opportunity for getting into touch with the human beings you can never *see*, and of attracting attention, admiration, even exercising a sort of power over others, instead of exciting no emotion other than a temporary, impersonal pity. Ask yourself what you would do if you were in that position.

The missionaries asked themselves the question, and found it hard to answer. Because of that, they were slow to speak to Joy on the subject. But the Scripture which says that all the fearful, unbelieving . . . sorcerers and all liars had their part in the lake of fire was one that could not be ignored, and the pressure it brought on their spirits found an outlet in prayer more than in admonition.

Joy herself acknowledged quite unasked that fortune-telling was only lying, and one day she arrived at the Gospel Hall very disturbed about the matter. If she refused to tell fortunes her mother-in-law was intensely angry. Why else would she want a blind daughter-in-law, who could do no sewing, no gleaning, who had to have her clothes made for her instead of making them herself, and those for the family as well? If she could not earn a little money by fortune-telling, what right had she to eat? The argument was unanswerable from the mother-in-law's point of view; and the neighbours, who were

sympathetically inclined towards the poor blind girl, could nevertheless see no reason why she should so obstinately refuse to use the obvious means of raising money by the usual and simple expedient of telling fortunes. But Joy feared God.

"I can easily deceive you, Teacher," she said. "If I go to the villages and tell fortunes, how do you know anything about it? But I can't deceive *God*."

It was not a conflict that could be decided once and for all—it was more likely to be a struggle of a lifetime, as some temptations are. It was unlikely that any other way of earning a living would open for Joy. She could always beg enough to keep herself alive, but there was no way of obtaining money other than by resorting to that which was lying, and perilously near to sorcery.

And now, as Teacher Dong led her into the little bare sitting room, and sat and talked to her, perhaps for the last time, a yearning, questioning fear strained at her heart. What did the future hold for this defenceless child? She had left her husband's home weeks ago, and was living again at the workhouse, so life had been easier for her. If the Japanese invaded the city, what would happen to Joy?

That very morning she had received a token for good, however. A letter had arrived, which contained a donation from people in America, whose hearts the Lord had touched with compassion for the blind Chinese girl whom they had never seen, but of whom they had read. Wonderful that that letter should have arrived that day. If it had been delayed a few more hours, it would have been too late. But as the tears pressed their way through the sunken lids, and the little blind girl sat quietly crying at the prospect of this sudden, irrevocable separation from the friends she had grown to love and trust, the missionary reminded her of the One who has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," and told her of the gift that

had come from Him for His little sightless child, that very morning. Joy believed in Him, even without this practical evidence of His love—but the feel of the money in her hand, this tangible reminder that He had her in His thoughts, strengthened and encouraged her, and the tears ceased, and a quiet smile came in their place. After they had prayed together, she rose to go. With the quiet poise of one who has suffered alone, she said, "I will go now, Teacher. You are so busy, I shall only hinder you." And holding her stick she walked out, the missionary beside her.

"Don't come any farther, Teacher," she said.

"I won't escort you, Joy," said Teacher Dong, using the formal phrase for parting. Then, "The Lord is with you." She watched the girl for a moment or two, as she walked slowly away, then turned back to the house. . . .

CHAPTER VII

PHŒBE, SERVANT OF THE CHURCH

JOY had only gone a few minutes when the missionaries again had to leave their hurried packing. Three women came into the courtyard, walking slowly, with the jerky, stilted steps of those whose feet have been permanently maimed by foot-binding. A flood of memories seemed to attend each one, threatening to surge up and overflow, submerging the missionaries with a melting, tender sorrow at the thought of leaving behind these fellow labourers in the Gospel.

Mrs. Wang led the way; a sturdy, diminutive little figure, brisk, quick, she had planned and worried and worked her way through twenty years of widowhood, rearing a beloved only son, almost as diminutive as herself. Somehow she had managed to give him an education which enabled him to earn a living as a clerk in a store, instead of as a farm labourer. Now she had provided him with a wife, and was planning and scheming and working to support, not only her daughter-in-law and grandson, but the baby girl she had adopted during the Famine as well.

It was many years ago that Mrs. Wang, as a despised little widow, first heard the Gospel from a missionary who paid periodical visits to Siangcheng. This missionary had shown much love to the undersized, disconsolate little widow, affectionately calling her her daughter, and Mrs. Wang, unloved and lonely, had responded willingly, not only to the messenger, but also to the Message of the Gospel. Through the long, difficult years, in her continual fight against poverty, she had taken a definite stand as a Christian, cheerfully unmoved, outwardly at any rate, at

any wordy persecution she might receive from her neighbours as she set off, Sunday by Sunday, to attend the service in the city. By dint of diligent study, she had learned to read her New Testament, and had even been promoted to office in the church as one of the deaconesses, and when a Women's Evangelistic Team was formed, she had been chosen to be one of its members.

As a preacher she was not an outstanding success, for she was very diffident when it came to expounding the simplest Gospel truths, although in practical matters she was by no means lacking in initiative and confidence. But the sight of a group of people waiting to be preached to overcame her with stage-fright! When the Women's Team was out in the country villages, Mrs. Wang could be relied on always to be ready to light the fire, carry water, make and cook the food, wait on all and sundry, and chat to the inquisitive people who came around. She, perhaps more than any of the others, was the one to be concerned for the comfort and convenience of the missionary, on whom the burden of the work fell the heaviest. She would walk with the best, carrying the tracts and the picture rolls, cheerfully and uncomplainingly returning at the end of a strenuous day to cook the evening meal for the four or five other members of the Team. But her efforts, when she made any, at preaching, were distinctly unconvincing, for she was apt to break out into a self-conscious giggle in the middle of her exhortations! And when, in evangelistic expeditions to the villages, a crowd gathered ready to listen to the Doctrine, there was always the danger that she would take fright and yield to the temptation to run away as fast as her sturdy little legs would carry her!

Perhaps the greatest challenge of her life had come through a bundle of dirty clothes. They belonged to a missionary who had lived in Siangcheng for a year, and was now doing country work in another district. She had

arrived unexpectedly one day, straight from the heathen town where she had been living under conditions of rather unusual hardship, which were intensified by her having no servant. When she arrived at the comfortable, though simple little Mission compound in Siangcheng, and discarded the clothes in which she had cycled for nearly a hundred miles across the dusty plain, Mrs. Wang was deeply moved. To think that Teacher Ee should not at least have someone to wash and mend for her! She was horrified to think that the missionary should have to squat in a dirty Chinese kitchen and stoke fires with the locally used, quickly-burning sorghum sticks, in order to make her own food! The diminutive Mrs. Wang was only about half the size of the missionary, but her heart was stirred to a protective tenderness to think of the unaccustomed hardships that the teacher was enduring now.

"I'll go with Teacher Ee, and serve her," she said. And although her heart failed her more than once at the thought of leaving her little home and family, to take a longer journey than she had ever travelled before and live in a strange city, she went, and served with as great a love and faithfulness as that with which Sister Lee had served her mistress. And when Teacher Ee took pity on an abandoned baby girl, dying in a temple during the Famine, and took her in, Mrs. Wang was the one who offered to adopt the child and bring her up as her own daughter. She was as good as her word. The little morsel of humanity that had looked like a pathetic, wizened animal when picked up from the temple floor was already a plump, smiling little creature who attracted quite a lot of admiration and attention when Mrs. Wang carried her proudly to Sunday morning services. A faithful little soul was Mrs. Wang. She had come now, drawn by the distressing news that the missionaries were leaving, and the smile on her rather furrowed face was strained as she came towards them.

Stephen's wife came, too, walking slowly. She had been one of the first to hear the news, her husband having told her of the announcement Teacher Dong had made at the Deacons' meeting after church service, and she had gone round to the Mission compound, straight into the little dining-room, and softly called "Teacher!" Teacher Dong, drawing aside the curtain that separated her bedroom from the dining-room, saw her standing there, her attractive face white, eyes red with weeping.

"Teacher! You're going away!"

Teacher Dong looked at her, and said gently, "Yes. . . . We're going away. . . . .We've got to go." Stephen's happy-go-lucky, rather independable, sympathetic, altogether lovable and human wife! Disappointing sometimes; she was more gifted than any of the other women, quick to grasp things, intelligent, with some indefinable quality that made people confide in her. She showed a grasp of spiritual truth that made her a more satisfying companion than most of the simple-minded Christian women in Siangcheng; and an understanding of human nature too. She was a valuable member of the Women's Evangelistic Team, for she preached clearly and with an unexpected conviction which solemnized her listeners to an unusual degree; and her easy-going temperament enabled her to get along with all the other members of the Team, some of whom were not so easy to live with! She wept with them that wept, and laughed with them that laughed. That very temperament, however, made her a rather unreliable quantity, one who was apt to fluctuate spiritually, sometimes wholeheartedly keen, sometimes slack and indifferent. But she was so very human and approachable! And now the grieved affection of her responsive heart gave expression to itself in tears, and the declaration that she wanted the missionaries to live *for ever* in Siangcheng! There was a strange comfort to Teacher Dong in the undisguised sorrow and sense of personal loss displayed

by Stephen's wife that afternoon. It is so soothing to be loved!

This morning, however, as she walked towards the missionaries, she was self-controlled again, and even smiling, in spite of the unusual pallor of her face. But it was not on her, nor on sturdy little Mrs. Wang that Teacher Dong's eyes were fixed. The third woman in the group, slightly taller than the other two, well-preserved, healthy, looked up and saw her. Their eyes met for a long moment, then the woman stopped still, and broke out into a wailing cry that seemed to come from pent-up emotions that could no longer be suppressed.

Mrs. Han, the strong, the cheerful, the composed! Mrs. Han, whose child-like faith in a loving Heavenly Father was so firm that she had sometimes seemed almost super-human, beyond the ordinary frailties of human nature! Mrs. Han, who only on the recognized occasions for a display of noisy grief, at the death and funeral of husband and father, showed any emotion, who even yesterday, when the sudden news of the missionaries' evacuation was told her, received it with philosophical calm!

Her two companions hurried forward now to support her, and Teacher Way led her gently into the little dining-room, murmuring words to soothe her. But Teacher Dong stood quite still, unable to speak, her face buried in her hands.

Mrs. Han, more than any of the others, had been her fellow worker during the four years since she came to Siangcheng. Unlike Stephen's wife, she could always be relied upon to put the work of the Kingdom before anything else. She would leave her own work without any hesitation to go out visiting, or preaching, or to pray for some special need. She had left all to follow Christ, and was steadfastly set to suffer the loss of all things, that she might win Him.

It was more than ten years ago that her husband had

told her that a gatekeeper evangelist was needed for the Gospel Hall in Siangcheng, twenty miles from the small city in which they lived, and where they had a prosperous little dyeing business. A happy wife, rejoicing in the gift of a little daughter who had been born to her when she had given up hope of ever having children, comfortable and contented in the security of her life, it was a rude shock to realize that her husband was asking her to leave her home behind, give up the business that supplied them so amply with all their needs, and move to the strange city, to live on the small salary of a gatekeeper evangelist. She felt she could not face it. She had been a Christian for some years, and loved the Lord, but she had not expected that she would ever be called upon to make a sacrifice like that for Him.

Her husband encouraged and persuaded her for some time.

"But it is so far away!" she said. Twenty miles, travelling on a wheelbarrow is the better part of a day's journey, even in flat Honan, and to Mrs. Han, who had lived all her life in or near the city of Shenkiu, the distance seemed very long.

"Far away?" said her husband. "But think of the missionaries who come to preach to us—how far they have to come!" Mrs. Han thought—thought of the missionaries living right there in Shenkiu. They had come from thousands of miles away, from across the sea, an unimaginable distance! And such is the power of human examples—Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ—that Mrs. Han fearfully but definitely expressed herself willing to go the twenty miles to Siangcheng, and live there for the Gospel's sake. So the little family, with Mr. Han's old father, sold up their business, stored their furniture, and moved away to live in the Gospel Hall compound in Siangcheng.

Mr. Han was a sincere and earnest worker, going out

day after day, preaching in the markets, talking to people on the streets, visiting the Christians, encouraging, comforting and exhorting them. Perhaps it was his zeal that inspired his more phlegmatic wife, for she too went out visiting, making her way with a gracious cheerfulness into strangers' courtyards, talking in a friendly way about the shoes they were making, the fineness of the cotton they were spinning, the best way of cutting out clothes, gently and tactfully introducing the Gospel message to them when their suspicions as to her intentions had been quieted, and inviting them to attend Sunday services in the Gospel Hall to hear more of the Doctrine. She often took her little girl with her in the early days, before the child went to school, and "Little Grace" and her mother were familiar figures in the courtyards and the streets of the rambling old city. Mrs. Han was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, neither did she hesitate to confess His Name before men.

"Come to service on Sunday!" she would call cheerily to the women squatting in their doorways, minding their children or making clothes. "You should believe in Jesus!"

A capable and diligent woman, she willingly undertook the mundane tasks that have to be done in a Chinese church compound. The wadded quilts that were constantly used by Christians in the guest-rooms, or travellers who stayed overnight, were her care, and she saw to it that they were kept well-mended and clean. Cheerfully she went to heat water for guests to wash their faces, or trotted out to fetch a kettle of tea from one of the teashops which are always to be found in Chinese cities. On Sundays she was always ready to welcome the women who came to her courtyard before Church service began, and her little sitting-room soon filled up with chattering women; and when the service was over, it was no unusual thing for one or two of the poor ones to be kept behind to "help" her get dinner for the family—and, of

course, it was understood that they partook of the meal, too. Her good deeds were performed with such graciousness that they never seemed like "charity."

Some years after they moved to Siangcheng, Mr. Han showed signs of tuberculosis, and, in spite of careful treatment, he gradually got worse, and was confined to his bed. He needed special food, and the small salary of an evangelist gatekeeper was not sufficient to provide it. Bit by bit, through the years, the money raised from the sale of their business had been spent, for there were four mouths to feed and four bodies to be clothed, and Mrs. Han, who, for all her capability, never seriously thought of economizing, continued to eat tasty food and use the best flour. Now that her husband needed chickens and eggs, milk, and other luxuries, they must be provided—so one by one the pieces of stored furniture were sold.

Although he required more attention now, she continued to go out visiting and preaching.

"Go along," he would say to her. "I'm all right. You cannot but go and tell them of Jesus." She went, calmly cheerful, committing everything to her Heavenly Father, claiming the indwelling power of the Spirit in simple faith for her ministry. And she returned to find him patiently lying on his bed, told him where she had been, then went off to get the dinner ready before Grace came back from school.

The missionaries who lived in the city those days were real friends to her, and she never forgot their kindness. But the time came for them to go home on furlough; and then her husband got weaker and weaker, and eventually died. He had finished his course, fought a good fight, kept the faith. Loving and reverent hands laid him to rest, in a tiny portion of the little bit of land owned by the diminutive Mrs. Wang—for the Hans had no land of their own in which to bury him. And Mrs. Han, with an aged father-in-law and a schoolgirl daughter, returned

from her weeping at his grave to face life without him.

It was just two or three days afterwards that Teacher Dong first met her. She had gone to her home town, Shenkiu, for a short visit, at the invitation of the missionary living there. Her head and ankles bound round with the white cloth which is the emblem of mourning in China, accompanied by her daughter, she entered the Mission compound, composed, cheerful, smiling. The burden of widowhood had been rolled away by a simple act of faith, for at the prayer meeting that night she prayed simply, thanking the Lord for having taken her burden from her. And the only occasions when she seemed to be conscious of that burden were when she went, once a year, to visit the grave of her husband on the anniversary of his death, and sat down and wept; and when, later, her old father-in-law died too, and in a paroxysm of grief she rocked to and fro, moaning, "My father is dead! My husband also is dead! My husband also is dead!"

Throughout the years, as the financial situation became more acute through the Famine, when she, too, went to the fields to pick weeds to eke out her flour supply, she remained outwardly imperturbable. She would rarely admit that her finances were low, and it was perhaps only to the missionaries that she sometimes admitted her growing anxiety—for she had nothing left to sell now. But she invariably ended up with a declaration of faith—"I *believe* the Lord will provide for me. . . ."

And, of course, He did; but the refining process, the tests that were put on that faith of hers, being more precious than gold that perisheth, were bringing her to a recognition of her own weakness that she had never known before. Like Job, she had strengthened the weak hands, and her words had upholden him that was falling —but now it had come upon her, and there were times when she nearly fainted, although it was only those who knew her well who ever saw her anything else but strong.

And when she had unburdened her heart, she always rallied again, staying herself upon her God.

During the past few days she had had to move to the new church compound, leaving the home where she had lived for about five years, and which was so closely associated with her husband and father-in-law. The room allotted to her on the new church compound was far inferior to the neat little three-roomed home she had occupied on the Mission compound, and the courtyard was full of builders and building material, and there was much coming and going. She was distressed at the thought of being to some extent responsible for the new compound, having been told rather airily by the tall deacon, of whom she was unaccountably afraid, that the church could not afford to employ a gateman, so she would have to fill that position. The future had been looking dark and uncertain indeed, but she was sustained by the sight of the four-roomed house that was being prepared for the missionaries. At any rate they would be there, and if the deacons unwittingly demanded too much of her, the missionaries would not be afraid to speak up on her behalf; and when she was in a difficulty, and could not think of a "way out," then she could go to them. As she sat in the living-room now, pouring out the distress of her heart as she faced the future with these friends, who seemed to be her last visible support, gone, her paroxysm of grief was something too deep for human comfort to touch.

Stephen's wife, her quick sympathy for the sorrow of others moved, was crying quietly. Mrs. Wang, furrowed face all anxious at the distress of this one on whom she had always leaned, stood trying to exhort her. Teacher Way murmured words of Scripture to strengthen her. Teacher Dong, unable to say a word to try and soothe this awful grief, could only pray, "Oh, Lord! It's too much for her! It's more than she can bear. Lord Jesus—help her."

With the same startling suddenness with which the outburst had started, it ceased. Mrs. Han straightened herself, dried her eyes, was calm again. As always, she rallied, again staying herself upon her God.

She never was, and never would be, a good preacher, and exposition was beyond her. She was not one to enjoy the bitter-sweet of meditation on the death of self which must precede resurrection life and power, or to indulge in melancholic thought on the cost that must be paid to share in the deeper fellowship with the Lord that so few of His followers know. But she was one who was learning by practical experience to say, with Paul, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

THE WOMEN FROM THE STREET OF THE OILHOUSE

THEY stood in the church courtyard, a little group of drably-clad women, from one of the poorest streets in Siangcheng. Most of them had come earlier in the day to obtain some grain from the Famine Relief store, but no-one had told them then that the missionaries were leaving, and they had gone away unaware of anything unusual having happened, realizing only that they had received more grain than at previous distributions.

Later, however, one of them had heard the news, and it was easy to picture what had happened then. Mrs. Wu would leave her husband in charge of the little store where they sold candles and cigarettes and paper, and other uninteresting-looking things, and go across the street to ask Mrs. Chang if she knew anything about it—was it true, this news that her schoolboy son had brought to her? He declared it was—that the missionaries were selling everything, clothes and furniture, everything, and were going away to-morrow. And Mrs. Chang would say that it couldn't be true—had she not been to the Gospel Hall that very morning to receive some grain? The two deacons had given her an extra lot of grain, but had said nothing about the missionaries leaving. But then would come the thought that there was something strange about their manner; and why was so much grain distributed so unexpectedly?

Fearing lest, after all, there was truth in this rumour, the two women would decide to go and ask Mrs. Li, who was practically a deaconess, and friendly with Stephen's wife, and to some extent in the "inner circle"

of the church community. Surely she would know whether or not this news was true? And maybe before they even reached her little one-roomed home they would meet Mrs. T'ien, who would mournfully confirm their fears, having just heard herself. After much discussion as to what it could all mean, fearful suppositions as to the nearness of the Japanese, and debates as to whether the missionaries were going very far away, they would decide that they must go to see them, and say goodbye. They would all go—all who had been recipients of the material as well as the spiritual benefits dispensed from the Gospel Hall. So widowed Mrs. Hsu, and Mrs. Wu, mother of Hsiang, and one or two more would be visited, told the news, and, dropping their work, walk along with the others to say goodbye.

Now here they were, standing subdued and silent as they saw signs of the hasty preparations for flight. Strangers were in the compound that day, come to see what the foreign women had to sell. The missionaries were busy packing, talking to people, making arrangements for the departure on the morrow. The women from the Street of the Oilhouse were overcome with a sense of the irrevocable, and as the missionaries came towards them there seemed suddenly nothing to say. Even Mrs. Li, usually so self-possessed and very much the "lady," was quiet and subdued.

Mrs. Li, to be frank, was one of the church problems. Not that there was anything wrong with her manner of living, for she had long since left behind all questionable practices. She neither smoked nor gambled, was honest in her dealings, separated from heathen superstitions, and, except on rare occasions, a comparatively strict Sabbatarian. But—but—she had a difficult temperament! It seemed to be the one thing she could not leave behind! The Chinese Christians referred to it as though it was something that was not part of herself, but a sort of

"little black dog" that lived with her, sometimes safely asleep, but which might wake up at any time and bite whoever happened to be around! When Mrs. Li had offended someone with her sharp tongue, Stephen's wife or Mrs. Han, anxious to restore peace, would explain "Mrs. Li has a little bit of a temperament! She doesn't mean anything!" And, usually, she didn't mean anything. Had anyone told her that she spoke unkindly, and in a bad-tempered manner, she would have been genuinely surprised, and wouldn't have believed it.

As is always the case, she was the chief sufferer from "the little bit of a temperament" that had dogged her all her life. She was married to an official in quite a good position, who took a second wife, and treated Mrs. Li very badly, beating her when she became a Christian, and eventually leaving her altogether. Those who knew Mrs. Li felt a certain degree of sympathy for the man, and reserved silent judgment as to whether he was wholly to blame for what might, in more "enlightened" countries, be termed the incompatibility of temperament that destroyed the domestic happiness of the Li family.

Nevertheless, in spite of "the little bit of a temperament" that sometimes flared out in angry words, sometimes manifested itself in a hurt silence at a fancied slight, when she had even been known to absent herself from Sunday services for a week or two, she was a valuable and valued member of the church in Siangcheng. She had a real affection and concern for the people in the Street of the Oilhouse, visiting and praying with them in times of sickness, and exhorting them to faith in the God she undoubtedly loved. She had a healthy vigour of spirit that appreciated law and order, and she heartily approved any efforts that were made to correct the rather happy-go-lucky forms of worship and church government that prevailed in the local church. She had real powers of endurance, too. Often, when out with the Team, she

would suffer from a racking cough that kept her awake for hours; but she never allowed that to prevent her from putting in a full day at preaching, walking from one village to another, sometimes in bitterly cold weather.

A rugged character, Mrs. Li; a lonely woman, and one who had suffered. Yet she was one who could be strangely soothing, for she possessed a certain gift of silence which the missionaries, at any rate, found very restful, although she spoke very forcefully on occasion. Of the little group of women gathered in the church compound now, she was the most outstanding.

There were special memories connected with each one, however, personal contacts that made each one precious. Who could forget the patient sorrow and triumphant faith that had characterized Mrs. T'ien as she had lived through those bitter hungry days of the Famine, when there were three children looking at her with questioning dependence? Only those who have never known what it is to be hungry, who have never suffered the anguish of seeing their children unsatisfied, would be able to condemn her because the grain entrusted to her to grind sometimes came back with short measure those days. Her baby died in the end, and although she wept, she did not reproach God nor charge Him foolishly. And it was with sincere joy that she agreed to have a cottage meeting in her sitting-room on Saturday afternoons, to which the other Christian women in the Street of the Oilhouse were invited.

Mrs. Chang, too, the maker of fireworks. What searchings of heart there had been over those fireworks! They were almost entirely used for heathen purposes, and Mrs. Chang always felt uneasy about making them. Before her husband, who was not a Christian, had been killed in one of the rare bombings of Siangcheng, she had felt that if ever she were free to make the choice herself, she would not, in any circumstances, sell those things that seemed

to sear her conscience. When, however, she was left a widow with two children to provide for, she found the only way of earning a living she knew was making fireworks, and she seemed to lack the initiative and vitality to make a fresh start. Persecution she could endure, and she went through the Famine with a patient faith in God which never seemed to falter, and with a self-sacrificing concern for others even worse off than herself that humbled Teacher Way and Teacher Dong as they saw it in not a few of the poor Christians, during those days when the souls of men were put to a very fiery trial. But in spite of giving up the firework business on two or three occasions, she always reverted to it. The physical and mental effort that would be required to learn some new trade seemed more than she could face with the lowered vitality of a middle-aged woman whose body had been fed with sustaining, but not strengthening food. And perhaps because she knew the love of a parent for a child she drew rich comfort from the knowledge that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him—for He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.

Mrs. Wu, mother of Hsiang, stood in the group. A patient woman with several children, one or another of whom always seemed to be ailing, her husband eked out a hand-to-mouth existence by selling flour. They ground it themselves, for the donkey that used to push the heavy grindstone round and round had to be sold during the Famine. Nearly every member of the family had to help, first sorting the grain, picking out the little stones and bits of brick that somehow got mixed in; shaking it through the sieve to get the whitest, finest flour (they ate the bran themselves, now they didn't have the donkey to feed); and, finally, carrying it out in a basket, with a pair of scales, to weigh it out, a few ounces at a time, to sell at the early-morning market when the street would be lined with vendors, squatting on their haunches in front of

their wares of fruit, meat, vegetables, fish, grain, beans, flour, salt, cloth, combs, scissors and haberdashery. Of the whole family, the fifteen-year-old daughter Hsiang was the strongest character. It was some years ago that Mrs. Li had prayed for the little demon-possessed girl, and in the Name of the Lord cast out that demon, taught the child to pray, and had the joy of seeing her accept the Saviour. The child had grown in faith, and it was through her exhortations and prayers that her parents had been influenced.

There were others in the group this afternoon, too. Mrs. Chao, a complacent woman, smilingly ready to admit that she had grown lukewarm, but who had just recently been showing faint signs of spiritual awakening. Mrs. Hsu, apologetic, eager to say and do the right thing amongst the Christians whose faith her dead husband had so firmly embraced, but about which she was still distressingly hazy herself. Cheerful Mrs. Wu from the drab little shop, who had only recently believed, but who was delighted that her twelve-year-old son, who had first persuaded her to attend the Gospel Hall services, and for three or four years had been in the habit of praying at bedtime, short, simple, boyish prayers, had been baptized and was now a church member.

They stood, gazing at the missionaries, and a little patter of remarks came from the group, quietly, slowly, like a few raindrops falling in summer:

"We didn't know you were going. . . ."

"We've only just heard—when my little boy told me I couldn't believe it. . . ."

"Will you be coming back, Teacher?"

"She used to come often when my baby was ill, to see how it was. . . ."

"You never knew when one of them would be coming along to visit us—now they're going, who will there be to come and comfort us?"

Some of them were crying now—not noisily, but with the patient sorrow of those who are accustomed to mourn. And, indeed, most of them were. Suffering, privation, death, were familiar visitors in the Street of the Oilhouse. "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." It was their sorrow and their need that drew the One whose ministry it is to bind up the broken-hearted. Though He sometimes used human feet to go, and human lips to speak, and human hands to touch in sympathy, it was nevertheless He who went. And He hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

As they returned from accompanying the women to the door, Teacher Dong noticed a little boy standing in the garden. It was Mrs. Wu's son. Nearly four years ago, when Teacher Dong first went to Siangcheng, she had attended the funeral of Mrs. Hsu's husband, and this little boy had gone too. The child and the missionary had walked out to the grave together, and he had politely carried her coat. As they walked they talked, and from that time there had been an unspoken but intimate bond between them, as between those who have seen together beyond the outward appearance of things. He had been one of the most regular attendants at Sunday School, although not one of the most attentive, for he was easily distracted, a restless little boy, and not particularly intelligent.

On a few occasions he had gone off to the Roman Catholics, probably attracted by the pictures and the statues and the incense. Nevertheless, he had answered up convincingly enough when the deacons had examined him for baptism, and those gentlemen, zealous to test the reality of the faith of those received into the church, were satisfied with him—though they turned down the sons of three of the most influential people in the church, including the tall deacon's! As the missionary looked at him now, she was conscious of a tender love for this little brother. He looked at her wistfully.

"Peace, Teacher," he said, using the formal greeting between Christians. She was going away, and they might never meet again on earth. She wanted to stop and talk to him, but there was so much to do, people were waiting in the dining-room even now to see her, clothes and household effects were strewn all over the house, needing to be sorted and packed. Furthermore—what could she say? She stopped, longing for words, but no words came. They looked at each other.

"Peace," she said, smiling rather sadly. But it *was* peace. They would meet again.

CHAPTER IX

THE SAINT

MR. CHANG was sitting in the little dining-room, dismantled now of the few pictures that adorned its rather dingy walls. He rose politely as the missionaries entered, and it was almost a relief to them to observe that his round, shining face bore its accustomed happy smile, for this sensitive, affectionate little man was one to whom tears came easily, and they feared a further straining of emotion. But he was surprisingly cheerful, and his lips were parted now in a broad, childlike smile that revealed the gold fillings in his teeth, as he spoke quite naturally of the possibility of the two teachers having to take a very long journey.

Mr. Chang was one of the few men of some social standing in the church in Siangchang. He had had a good education, and at one time had occupied the position of city magistrate in another province. It was when he was visiting his home on one occasion that his elder brother, with whom he lived, persuaded him to go to the Gospel Hall, and hear the doctrine. Mr. Chang, followed by that brother's prayers, went, and it was not long before he was convinced of the reality of that which he heard. There was some childlike credulity under the suave exterior of this man of the world of old China that responded very readily to the warm, drawing power of Divine Love, and an emotionalism that found its perfect and satisfying outlet in communion. He spent hours each day, reading his Bible and pouring out his heart in ecstatic devotion, or in pleading with tears for the salvation of others. To him the hour of prayer was truly sweet; it was not often that *he* failed to attend the church prayer meeting.

He was not a man of much initiative, preferring to follow rather than to lead, and although he almost invariably attended the deacons' meetings, he rarely took any active part in the discussions, seeing first one point of view and then the other, and being more easily swayed by his emotions than his reason. He would willingly preach, and walk miles to do so if necessary, but he would never be one to organize and control.

His family life was not without its complications. At the time of his conversion he was already married to two wives—an unhappy state of affairs which was simplified somewhat when his first wife left him. His second wife, the mother of his three little girls, however, exercised her wifely prerogative by nagging him continually about the amount of money that he gave away now that he had become a Christian. This he bore with philosophical calm, and as there were a number of rooms on the family compound, he withdrew to one at the farther end, and contented himself by praying for her, and continued his life of happy communion. His prayers for his wife were answered by the God of all wisdom, who alone worketh wondrously. Their eldest child, a bright, intelligent little girl of about six, was suddenly smitten with sunstroke, and it seemed that her reason was seriously affected. The natural concern of the mother expressed itself in anxiety; that of the father in the quiet prayer of faith. Then, one day, when the mother was talking and fretting about the child, Mr. Chang said, "It's no use your talking. It is all the result of your sin. Why don't you go to the missionaries, and ask them to pray for you?" The woman, burdened with the conscious anxiety for her child, went. And when she was sitting down in the dark little dining-room, the pressure that the Spirit of God had been bringing on her rebellious soul became so strong that, to Teacher Dong's surprise, the whole story of her resentment against her husband's religion came pouring out,

and when, at last, she asked for prayer for her little girl, only the gentle suggestion that they should kneel down and ask for forgiveness for herself first was needed.

"I feel as though a big brick has been taken away from my heart," said Mrs. Chang as they rose from their knees. And she went home to ask her husband's forgiveness, and to tell him how she had come in penitence to the God he worshipped.

The next morning Mr. Chang came to see the missionaries. He sat down in one of the basket chairs in their narrow little sitting-room, with its yellow walls and rush-matted floors, and, leaning forward, said simply in a choked, quiet voice, "Thank you, Teacher. Thank you." And a new bond was forged between them as they talked in joyful wonder of the way this precious soul had at last been brought to the Lord and Giver of Life.

Now he was sitting before them again, quite probably for the last time. They would not again see that childlike, happy smile, hear that fervent, ecstatic voice in prayer. Memories that wanted to overflow had to be repressed—memories of the responsive, rapt attention on his face as he listened to the Word of God; memories of him standing in a little square room made of mud bricks, in one of the outstations, quietly and absorbedly and happily reading his Bible; memories of him standing in the pulpit, trying to express an inward rapture for which no words were equal; memories, too, of irrepressible healthy enjoyment of tasty meals and merry laughter.

He rose to go, still surprisingly calm and cheerfully polite. He bowed, wished them a prosperous journey, and departed. His calmness was steadying, but it left one of the missionaries feeling a little puzzled. Did the fellowship of the past years mean nothing? Was it so easy to say goodbye?

But the other missionary knew. She caught a glimpse of his face out in the courtyard, when he thought no one observed him. No, it was not so easy.

CHAPTER X

THE TALL DEACON

THE tall deacon came about the middle of the afternoon. His dark straight hair was swept back from an unusually broad forehead and his inscrutable eyes looked out on life with an impersonal gaze. He was slim, though well-built, and in his long Chinese gown he always looked an impressive figure. A man who spoke little, whose nature lacked the warm geniality of the "good mixer," he was one who was feared rather than loved. He was, undoubtedly, the dominating figure in the church in Siangcheng, and in any matters of church policy or administration it was he who ultimately got his own way.

He had been converted when a young man, and had turned resolutely from serving idols to worship the living God, enduring no little persecution from his family as a result. Strong and determined, he was nevertheless wise, too, and did all that he could to propitiate his irate family by making them handsome presents on suitable occasions, and by withdrawing from no worldly associations that were not in apparent and direct opposition to the Christian faith.

He was married to a very delicate, gentle little wife who was the only daughter of a wealthy family, and after a while she, too, turned to the Lord, in whom she found her solace and her strength during the years of union with a man whose nature was exacting, proud, determined and secretive. She bore him two children, girls, on whom she lavished her love. And during a period in their married life in which her husband ceased attending church services, and drifted so far as to take a second wife, although her heart was nearly broken, she continued in prayer for him.

What deep spiritual experience started him back on the hard road of repentance, probably no one knows. What is known is that one day he met another backslider of the church in Siangcheng, a man whom he had known well in the days when they had both rejoiced to go up to the house of God, and said to him, "I hear there are some special meetings being held in the church in Shenkiu. We've both gone wrong—let us take advantage of this opportunity to get right again. Come with me to Shenkiu." So the two of them went, spent some days in Shenkiu, and turned their faces Zionwards once more.

The way back was hard for the tall deacon. He got rid of his second wife, a coarse, rather slatternly-looking young woman, as quietly as possible—but she refused to be got rid of, and from time to time would go along to his shop, waylay him in the street, or even go to the Gospel Hall, proclaiming her grievances in a loud voice. It was a terrible loss of face for the proud, dignified man; there seemed nothing for it but to endure it. "I will bear mine iniquity. . . ." Meantime, he had set himself to make what amends he could to his slighted little first wife. He showed her a care and courtesy most unusual in a husband of old China. He was concerned that she should not catch cold or be unduly worried. When he was away from home for any length of time, he wrote to her often because, as she told the missionaries one day, pleased and almost coy at having received another letter, "He knows I get so anxious."

As time went on, and his time and attention became more and more concentrated on doing the will of God, he spent hours in thought, in study, in planning for the church. Behind his chemist's shop was a long, narrow room, lighted at one end by a tiny skylight, and at the other by a window-frame over which was pasted flimsy white paper. Here he had his desk and his books, and here he spent hours and days, reading, studying, planning.

In private conversation he was rarely really communicative, but on the occasions when he preached he spoke with a frankness and sincerity that revealed the development of the spiritual man within, that new creation implanted in the imperious, self-willed, coldly calculating natural man, that was slowly but surely bringing all things into subjection. Fundamentally unemotional, his devotion to his Lord found natural expression in convincing, well-thought-out sermons rather than ardent prayers; his love for his neighbour in a carefully prepared scheme for the distribution of a small, but adequate quantity of food to be given to a limited number of poor Christians daily for a certain period when the Famine was at its height, rather than in an impulsive, generous liberality that is stirred to quick, sympathetic action at the sight of human suffering.

Nevertheless, there were occasions, rare indeed, when even this self-possessed, inscrutable man was touched with emotion. Teacher Dong remembered a sunny autumn morning, and a stuffy, crowded country church. The message at that morning gathering had been of Christ's relationship as Elder Brother to the believer. At the close of the meeting a short time had been spent in prayer, and the tall deacon, his voice broken with emotion, thanked the Lord for this wonderful grace bestowed upon him, one who was so unworthy. She remembered, too, times when they had been discussing the affairs of the church that were so vitally real to them both, and the sense of comradeship in the service of the Lord had knit their hearts together. She had seen something beyond that unapproachable, mask-like exterior that frightened so many. She remembered seeing him, preaching, stand in the street during an open-air meeting, unáshamed of the Gospel of Christ, this proud, dignified, erstwhile almost insolent man. He was one upon whom God had got a grip.

This afternoon, however, he was absolutely impersonal.

He had not come to bid farewell to the missionaries—he had merely come because he had heard that there were two little tables for sale that he thought he would like. He did not even stop to speak as he saw Teacher Dong in the courtyard, merely smiling as he passed, and saying in a rather unusually hearty voice,

"You're making a very clean sweep! Do you hope not to come back?"

Teacher Dong was not so good at hiding her feelings. It *hurt* to be leaving them all.

"It's not that we hope not to come back—we're afraid lest we shan't," she answered quietly. The tall deacon passed on, looked at the tables, paid for them, and departed.

CHAPTER XI

SONS OF THUNDER

THROUGHOUT the day two tall young men wandered about the compound, prying with boyish interest into the little piles of belongings that the missionaries were hastily discarding as they tried to pack. One of them, Mr. Ma, was an erratic excitable young man who always seemed at least ten years younger than his twenty-eight summers. He had been soundly converted when a boy in his teens, and in spite of persecution in his home, and jeering at school, had gone on steadily witnessing for the Lord, and enjoying fellowship with His people, even though so many of them were of the illiterate, peasant class. Himself a member of quite a wealthy family, he was better-educated than the vast majority of the church members in Siangcheng, and, in spite of his restless temperament, he could apply himself wholeheartedly to study, displaying a certain brilliance in some subjects. When the need for a teacher for the somewhat ragged little Church School which had been started was presented to him, however, he renounced all thoughts of worldly advancement, and willingly accepted the uncertain and small salary offered, in order to serve the One whom he undoubtedly loved, and who has said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." For months he worked amongst them, doing not only the duties of teacher, but menial tasks of cleaning up that any ordinary man in his position would have scorned.

Surprisingly diffident, this tall, well-built young man was one who had always been glad to help the missionaries in any work amongst children, for whom he had a special love. There was some childlike quality in him that

responded to the happy enjoyment they found in simple sports and pleasures, and at Daily Vacation Bible Schools he could be relied upon to take the boys off for a rowdy game, to entertain the children with novel drawing-classes, or to lead a group of them as they filed around the streets, inviting others to come to the meetings. There was nothing irksome to him in spending days in this way, although it was difficult indeed to persuade him to speak at the Gospel Meeting. He was not qualified—he had not been to Bible School—he did not understand the Doctrine. He was not afraid to witness; that he did fearlessly; but he did not consider himself a preacher. Perhaps he wasn't. He usually managed to hold the children's attention when he *was* persuaded to preach, however, for his antics and facial expressions made Bible stories very vivid indeed!

His declared aim was to work for the Lord, after he had graduated from College, and he kept this aim before him. His English Bible, which he had already read right through, was copiously marked—and adorned with paintings of flowers, or fantastic little sketches of such scenes as Adam and Eve eating the apple, or the lions prowling around a dauntless Daniel! He was a strange mixture; a child emotionally, a man spiritually.

His companion was a healthy-looking, round-faced, strong young peasant. New Covenant, as he was called, was as whole-heartedly zealous for the Lord as Mr. Ma, although very different temperamentally. Impetuous too, he was one who had suffered persecution in his home for Christ's sake. More than anything else, perhaps, he was a follower after righteousness. He had worked for Christian employers on different occasions, and he told them exactly what he thought when he saw them supplying their customers with cigarettes, and sometimes wine, although they did not partake themselves. He was scrupulously honest in all his dealings, and when he

harangued the congregations on Sunday mornings on righteousness, which he sometimes did with greater zeal than wisdom, he was in the position of one whose own reputation is unimpeachable.

Perhaps it was his love of honesty and justice that endeared him specially to the missionaries, and they to him. While they sometimes privately questioned his wisdom, his uncompromising attitude commanded their admiration; and his genial friendliness and willingness to help, their affection.

It was not until this crisis necessitating flight, however, that they had realized the steadfastness of his personal regard for them. He was to be responsible for seeing that the baggage was safely conveyed to Chowkiakow, and although he was out of work, and at the end of his financial resources, he refused to accept more than the money to pay for his food on the journey.

"I feel we ought to be paying your expenses," he said. "But I can do nothing about that. I can see your baggage to Chowkiakow, though—and that I will do. And when I come back, if there are any affairs that you want settled, I will see to them for you." He spoke firmly and deliberately. If he undertook to do anything, he would see it through.

To-day there was not much he could do. He wandered around, with Mr. Ma, saw that nobody walked off with what was not theirs, and effected a few sales. But he was there—on hand.

CHAPTER XII

GRACE

THE day wore on, and the missionaries sat down for the last evening meal they would eat together in Siangcheng. Most of the interested purchasers and onlookers who had been roaming about the house and garden had departed, and most of the furniture had gone, too. The whole place had a dreary, untidy, impersonal look. It had been home for four years. Now it had suddenly ceased to be that any more.

The meal was scarcely over when Sister Lee came in to announce that Grace wanted to see the teachers to have a little talk with them. They jumped up to receive the Chinese maiden, Mrs. Han's daughter, who had been sitting quietly in the kitchen, waiting to see them.

"Grace is a saint," a visiting missionary had once said, and no other description seemed to fit her so perfectly. Her mother always regarded her as a special gift from God, for she had been born long after all hopes of having a child had faded, and she never seemed quite like other children. There was an other-worldliness about her, a gentleness, a lack of passion; as she walked round the little garden with Teacher Way, and they shared enjoyment of its beauties, she had all the unhurried tranquillity of one who knows the perfect rest of the heavenly state. She loved flowers and little living things. Her slim, industrious fingers planted seeds, tied drooping plants, caressed fluffy cats who relaxed into purring heaps as she stroked them.

She was very neat and careful over her clothes and her possessions, due largely, no doubt, to her mother's influence and training. When new clothes were given her

she rejoiced over them with childlike delight, and then put them carefully away, to bring them out only on very special occasions. Her few personal treasures—pencils, beads, pieces of silver paper and other oddments—were tidily put away in a cardboard box. If Grace threw anything away, it really *was* worthless and useless!

She had a simple, childlike faith in God, as simple and as natural as any child could have for an earthly father. On one occasion, at the Girls' Bible Class, Teacher Dong had obeyed a sudden impulse to ask for testimonies from those present. Surprising and revealing those testimonies had been, with a startling definiteness of spiritual experience from some from whom they were least expected. But when it came to Grace's turn, her head hung down and tears came to her eyes, for she had no testimony of arresting conversion to give. Very softly, through tears, came the simple words, "My father and mother believed the Lord. . . . I always lived in the Gospel Hall . . . and I believed the Lord." There had never been a time when she had not believed. As a flower opens to the sun, so her tender little heart had opened to the love of God.

There was nothing spectacular or startling about her service, either. Others might burn with a zeal that inflamed others, or witness with a vividness that arrested and appealed; Grace led the littlest ones in the Sunday School into a corner of the chapel, and sweetly and patiently told them of Jesus; when the zeal of some burned low, and they no longer came to teach in Sunday School, she took their little scholars into her class. The Sunday School dwindled, sometimes to two or three scholars, but if any came, there always was a Sunday School, for Grace took it. Patiently and pluckily she endured the wrigglings and chatterings and sometimes open defiance of some of the bigger boys, only three or four years younger than herself. But when other leading spirits appeared to help in the Sunday School, or organize special meetings, she

quietly and readily, without the least show of jealousy or resentment, slipped into a back seat, quite happy to take the tinies again.

Although she lived a sheltered life, and was apparently indifferent to the exciting attractions of outside influences, quite content to return home to the quiet security of the Mission compound after school, when others went for walks, or out visiting, she was popular with her schoolfellows, for there was nothing of the self-conscious prig about her. She had a healthy love of fun and games, and would throw herself with whole-hearted enjoyment into sports, eager to win, yet happy and unruffled if she lost. Just occasionally there would be a shadow of disappointment pass over her face when her mother refused her permission to attend shows or displays which she not unwisely felt might prove harmful to her daughter. But she evidently harboured no resentment, and in acceptance regained peace.

To live by faith in the God who feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies of the field was second nature to her. It was one of her mother's happy boasts that she had never had to buy clothes for Grace—"the child the Lord gave me"—for they had always been given to her, usually quite unexpectedly, by friends or relations. As the financial straitness of the little family had increased, Grace had become almost accustomed to seeing last-minute provisions of food and money come in from various sources, when Mrs. Han's faith had been almost at breaking point. And the mother and daughter had recognized all these gifts as coming from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Grace—a child of God, a lover of His handiwork, unspoiled, trusting. What did the future hold for her? Oh, that she might be spared the perplexities, the disillusionments, the sorrows that life in a fallen world brings to the simple, sensitive soul of one who has yet to

learn from bitter experience that human nature is not to be trusted; who was yet to learn that bitterest of all lessons, that she herself is not to be trusted! But how otherwise would the loyalty and faith of the new creation, born of God, implanted within the earthen vessel be proved?

Grace; she stood before them now, her glossy, straight, black bobbed hair enfolding her delicate little face with its slim eyebrows, candid eyes, and pale, lotus-like skin; and the missionaries were glad they had a leather writing-case ready to give her as a parting gift. It diverted them and her from the tense embarrassment of knowing they might never sit together again. She received the gift with childlike delight, opening it and peeping at all the little partitions, with exclamations of pleasure, and before she had recovered from the delight it gave her to possess it, and before the missionaries had time to face the realization that they had to say goodbye to this fifteen-year-old girl who had been so much more than a companion, Sister Lee appeared again, to say that the brethren from South Street had come to see the teachers; and Grace, with sweet instinctive modesty, slipped quietly out.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BRETHREN FROM SOUTH STREET

THE brethren from South Street entered, filing slowly into the little room. When they were inside, they turned gravely, bowed, and said, "Peace, Teacher. Peace, Teacher."

They sat down, rather self-consciously, four very ordinary Chinese men of the lower class. Their clothes were bulky-looking, of coarse material. There was nothing about them to attract attention, and to the Western eye they would have passed as four peasants. But Teacher Dong and Teacher Way had long since ceased to view them with Western eyes, and as they looked at them now, they saw four human beings, each with a history, an individual relationship to the life of the little city of Siang-cheng, each with a living soul in which the seed of Eternal Life had been conceived.

The leader of the group was a stubby, snub-nosed little man with a distinctly pugnacious expression. He had not been converted more than two or three years, but had turned with a wholehearted determination from idols to serve the Living God. With his big Bible wrapped in a piece of blue cloth, tucked under his arm, he stumped stolidly along to practically every meeting held in the Gospel Hall, earnestly turning up the Scriptures as they were read, listening with concentrated attention to those who expounded it. Being somewhat of a scholar of the old school, it was not long before he took his turn at speaking at Christian Endeavour Meetings, and later at the evening "lamp-light worship meetings." He spoke in a slow, deliberate manner, and his remarks were interspersed by many "umphs," and polite protestations of his ignorance

and lack of understanding of the Doctrine. His prayers were equally slow and deliberate, also punctuated by "umphs."

He took a deep interest in the business meetings of the church, and although he was not a deacon he turned up at all the meetings, and gladly, though apologetically, took on the secretarial work. He had become one of the members of the inner circle of the Church family, with a sense of special responsibility for the few Christians living in South Street, in whose personal family lives he took a fatherly interest, concerning himself with their quarrels, births, deaths, marriages, and poverty. And now he had come, leading three of the men from that street, to pay his courtesy call to the two foreign women whom he humbly regarded as his teachers in spiritual things.

Mr. Wang, the stocking-maker, sat down, a smile on his fat, rather weak face. He was a comparative newcomer to the district, a youngish man who had instinctively found his niche in the church, and fully enjoyed the fellowship he found there with kindred spirits who, like himself, had their faces turned Zionwards. Of a more emotional nature than the stumpy little man who had first "fathered" him when he arrived in Siangcheng, he prayed readily and sang lustily, though he found it more difficult to give his mind to Bible study. He had become a very familiar figure to the missionaries, for he often ensconced himself with his clumsy-looking stocking machine outside the front door of the Gospel Hall, and he was always ready with a cheery smile as they went in and out. It was only during recent weeks that he had come under somewhat of a cloud. His young wife, who had been ill ever since the birth, some months previously, of her first child, eventually died. Throughout her illness Mr. Wang had maintained an attitude of commendable concern for her, coupled with a sincere faith in God, and resignation to His will. Very shortly after she died, however, he

flouted Chinese convention by the arrangements he made for running his little home, and the care of the child upon whom all his affection now seemed centred, thereby causing much critical talk on the part of the heathen, who were, of course, quick to detect any inconsistency between practical living and the Christian profession of holiness. Several representations were made to him by the Church leaders, who urged him to behave in a manner more in accordance with normal standards, for the sake of the Name which he bore. At this point, alas! the obstinate streak so often found in weak characters asserted itself. His conscience was clear, and the heathen could think what they liked. In vain was the argument put to him that we should abstain from every appearance of evil. He refused to yield.

The missionaries, perplexed by the complexity of the situation, had been heartily glad that the Church leaders had concerned themselves about the matter. The undoubted sorrow Mr. Wang had felt over the loss of his wife, and his love for the child, had touched their hearts, and as he sat in their little room now, all the human complications of his life faded into the background, and they remembered only that he was a brother in the Lord.

A quiet man with dark, handsome eyes had come, too. Teacher Dong was especially grateful to see him there, for she remembered hi before he was converted. He had been an official in the city workhouse, which she had visited weekly with Mrs. Han for years, and on a few occasions he had wandered over to the dreary, dark room where the old women lived, to talk to the foreign woman who had come to "exhort" them, and to listen for a while to the doctrine she preached. It had been a joy that could scarcely be believed to hear that the witnessing of some of the Christians in South Street had not been in vain, and that Mr. Fan, in a time of strain when he fell foul of some of the powerful guerrilla soldiers in the district, had

called on the Name of the Lord, and promised to believe in Him if only He would deliver him from the hands of those he feared. He had been delivered, and he had therefore believed, and was now a baptised member of the Church. Not perfect—as his wife knew! Nevertheless, one who was following after.

The fourth man in the group was the one whose attendance at church services and fellowship was the most uncertain, although he now displayed the greatest distress at the departure of the missionaries. This seller of peanuts, voluble, blind in one eye, had always maintained an attitude of respectful friendliness towards them, and whenever he saw them in the city would leave his round, flat tray of salted nuts, beans and melon seeds perched rather precariously on a portable, spindle-legged stand, and step right in front of them where they would not fail to see him, and greet them with polite questions. Now, in the little dining-room, he poured out his regrets that he had not taken greater advantage of the opportunity of receiving the spiritual instruction that the foreign teachers had dispensed. This thought, he said, had come to him constantly since he had heard, earlier in the day, that they were going. He grieved to realise that the opportunity had passed.

The missionaries were somewhat surprised at this unexpected outburst, and uncertain how much was due to Chinese politeness, and how much to genuine regret. They were relieved when the conversation became more general. Questions were asked concerning their plans, supposing the rumours were true and the Japanese were starting a major offensive. Teacher Way and Teacher Dong did not try to conceal the hope that, should they be compelled to flee farther west, it might mean their return home for an already overdue furlough. They would like to see their parents again, they admitted, and such a hope found a ready and sympathetic response in the hearts of

people to whom filial affection is one of the chief virtues. The four men understood perfectly. It was only natural and right that the two teachers should wish to see their honourable parents again.

After a little while they rose to go. "Let us pray for the teachers on their long journey," said Mr. Wang, the stocking-maker. One by one they prayed, asking the Lord to give the teachers a speedy and peaceful journey back to their honourable country and honourable parents. Teacher Dong had a tense, strained feeling as Mr. Fan stumblingly ejaculated a few short sentences. It was the first time he had prayed aloud before others.

Quietly and soberly they said goodbye, bowed, walked out into the dark little courtyard, bowed again, and departed.

CHAPTER XIV

GOD IS NEAR

IT was already dark when a woman with an unusually flat Mongolian cast of face came on to the Gospel Hall compound. She was better-dressed than the usual type of visitor, and there was a quiet authoritativeness about her, different from the slightly apologetic, diffident manner of most of the women who attended the church. She was a Manchurian, a qualified doctor, and a personage of some distinction in the little city to which she and her family had fled when the Japanese had made their sudden onslaught in North China.

Educated in a Mission school, where the life and manner of her English teacher had won her for Christ, she had always been an earnest believer. She had not much spare time, for the care of her family affairs and the claims of her increasingly large practice kept her busy, but the missionaries always knew they had a friend in her.

Perhaps the most outstanding quality in her relationship to these two Westerners was the sense of responsibility she had for them. If ever she heard they were ill, she was immediately ready to tend them. When communications between them and their Mission Headquarters were uncertain, and she heard that they were having difficulty in obtaining money, she went round to see them, and offer to lend them as much as they were needing. They did not accept, and assured her that all was well, but on one or two occasions she gave them gifts. " 'These two Western sisters have left their homes and country to come and give the Gospel to us Chinese,' I thought," she told them. " 'And now they are in difficulties.' I feel that the Lord has told me to look after you."

Living as they did, only about twenty miles from the Japanese lines, they were constantly hearing rumours of Japanese plans to advance, which, should they materialize, would necessitate hasty flight. Dr. Wang, too, would have to flee. She had failed to do so once, and suffered severely as a result, and now, whenever she or the missionaries heard news of enemy activity, they always conferred together, and kept each other acquainted with the latest rumours. Some days previously Dr. Wang, who had friends amongst the military officials, had come to warn the missionaries of the serious danger that was threatening, and to urge them not to remain behind too long in Siangcheng.

"I am concerned about the two teachers," she had said. "You are unmarried, with no one to look after you. I should feel more peaceful if you went to Chowkiakow, or somewhere where there are people who will take care of you. But I want to tell you that if you do not get away, you can come with me and my family. We shall go to the country. Where we go, you shall go. Where we sleep, you shall sleep. What we eat, you shall eat." She spoke in her quiet, deliberate manner, and they felt that she meant what she said.

"Thank you, Dr. Wang," they replied. "Thank you very much. If the situation becomes really dangerous, however, we shall move to Chowkiakow."

"That would be better," she admitted. "You would be with your own people. But if there is a sudden move, and it is impossible for you to get there—you can come with us."

She was a well-known and respected figure in Siangcheng, and had quite a reputation as a "doctor of Western medicine." Day after day those soliciting her medical help would come with wheelbarrows, and she would be trundled off to remote country villages to tend sick people who had tried local doctors and turned to her as a last

resource. She was a real witness for the Lord, and often prayed over her patients, telling them that she could do nothing without His aid.

"I cannot preach, and I do not understand the Doctrine well," she would say. "But I know this—Jesus is good. If you will go to the Gospel Hall, there are people there who can explain the Doctrine to you."

Her life was too full and busy for her to come to the Gospel Hall often, but her faith and dependence upon God were very real. On one occasion she came to the missionaries to tell them that a cholera epidemic was threatening in the city, and to request that, with her, they would pray God to spare this disaster. She came the following day for the same purpose. Her approach unto God was made very quietly and deliberately, with reverence and godly fear, and God heard. A day or two later a terrific wind swept across the plain, striking the city with such violence that the branches of trees were snapped off like twigs, and the roofs torn off houses. But from that time the plague was stayed, and Dr. Wang declared that the wind had swept away the germs.

Until a few weeks ago, there had always been about her a soberness, a lack of spontaneous joy. She seemed like one who is courageously carrying a burden, but finding it heavy. Then something happened which opened up a new spring of joy and liberty in her life. She came to tell the two foreign women who were her friends about it.

A woman had been brought to her crude little hospital for treatment, and been given an injection. Within a few hours, instead of her condition improving, the woman became much worse—and then her pulse stopped beating, and she ceased to breathe. Dr. Wang was horrified, realizing that she would be held responsible, and open to monstrous claims from the woman's relatives. But she remembered the Lord. When the Lord was on earth, He had even raised the dead. She called her assistant, a

Christian woman, sister to Mrs. Han, and together they knelt down and prayed, reminding the Lord that He had raised the dead before, and He could do it now. Then they went and worked on the woman—went again and prayed—then back again. For three hours in the night this continued. Then the woman slowly revived. By morning she was well enough to be taken home. The next morning she was up, and getting food for her whole family!

"I have always believed in God," said Dr. Wang slowly, after she had recounted the story. "But this has made me realize that *God is near*. I believed before, but now I *know* that God—is—near."

"In Thy presence is fulness of joy." That which had been lacking in her Christian character, a happy, child-like spontaneity, now flowed out like a gently bubbling stream. She continued her work as usual—but as one who has been relieved of the responsibility of it.

All three of them were sobered as they sat together in the little dining-room now, however, for it was with the consciousness that they would probably never sit thus together again. Their times of intimate fellowship had not been many. Occasionally the Manchurian doctor, an exile from the home of her youth, had come to spend an evening with her two Western sisters, far from their home, too. The quiet talks over the supper table, the reminiscences, the unemotional intimacy of those evenings had bound them together in a way that only exiles can know.

Dr. Wang drew some money from her pocket. "This is the money for some of the teachers' crockery that I have bought," she said, counting it out. "And here is a little—only a very little—to help towards the teachers' travelling expenses. I wish I could do more." She laid the money on the table. "My heart is very sorrowful," she continued. "I know that you ought to go. I should be worried if you did not go, for the situation is really serious this time. But my heart is very sorrowful."

They talked together for a while, then she rose to go. With the flickering native oil lamp held aloft, casting a dim, uncertain light, the three women walked together along the bricked paths through the church compound, to the preaching chapel, through which they had to pass to reach the street door.

"When you have gone," said the Manchurian woman, in her quiet, deliberate voice. "When you have gone, I shall never come to this place again. Goodbye, teachers. I shall not come to see you to-morrow morning."

"No, Dr. Wang," they said. "Please do not come."

She stepped out into the street, turned, gave them the polite, formal little bow with which she invariably parted, and walked quickly but quietly away.

CHAPTER XV

THE ABIDING REALITY

VERY late that night, when at last the compound was quiet, the missionaries were packing; a box of clothes for Sister Lee, a box of clothes for Mrs. Han and Grace, a box of clothes for Mrs. Wang. There was no time to sort out gifts for any of the others, only for those who seemed to have the greatest claims. At last the boxes were closed, and the missionaries carried their flickering oil lamps to their little bedrooms, flung themselves upon their beds, and slept for the few hours that remained before dawn.

Dawn. Mrs. Deng was in the compound, for she had slept there all night, in order to be ready to discharge her final responsibilities without delay; Sister Lee, of course, was up and about; Stephen came, to see if the teachers were ready for breakfast. He had insisted that he and his wife would provide their last breakfast in Siangcheng, for they would be too busy, and have too much for Sister Lee to do, to want to bother about getting their own, he said.

The few hours passed like a busy dream. More people came on to the compound, standing about, watching the hasty preparations to leave, looking at the sadly dismantled house and the little garden that had become so stamped-down and forlorn-looking. The missionaries looked at them, too. Such memories were attached to them! Sister Lee squatting under the shady acacia tree, preparing vegetables for the midday meal; the Bible class girls with their straight, black bobbed hair, slim and dainty in their bright blue gowns, wandering around looking at the flowers and smelling the roses; the men who came to the Sunday afternoon Bible class, filing slowly but

purposefully into the little dining-room, their Bibles tucked under their arms; quiet days spent in study and preparation at book-laden desks; anxious days, too, when problems had oppressed and responsibilities seemed almost too heavy; nights when the rich foliage of the garden had been drenched in the moonlight, as the soul was drenched with that peace which passeth all understanding, and sunk in quiet slumber. Days of toil, and hours of ease. . . .

Teacher Dong went quickly into the chapel. The benches had gone, the pulpit had gone, only a few Gospel posters, too torn to be worth removing, remained on the brick walls. All had been conveyed to the new Church building. Never again would she see the blue-garbed throng of men and women gathered there for worship on Sunday morning, or sit with the little group that circled round in the centre of the hall to remember the Lord's death, when sometimes they had all but seen Him helplessly nailed to the Cross, for them.

She had only just crossed over the threshold when she heard a Voice. She stopped dead in her hurried walk towards the street door, and the tears sprung to her eyes as she heard seven words, spoken clearly and distinctly by One whose Voice dimmed every other sound. There was such grace in the Words He spoke, such unmerited favour, as nearly to melt her pent-up emotions and suppressed feelings. It would have been a relief to fling herself on her knees, and pour out her heart before Him, the One who was, after all, the Abiding Reality; the One whose patience never failed, who was never discouraged, neither grew weary; the One in whom was everlasting strength, and who was ever alongside to help; the One who pitieth like a father, and comforteth like a mother; the One who has said, "Whosoever doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven, the same is . . . My sister," and who had proved a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. But there was no place for her to go to obtain

privacy now. "Lord, Thou art our dwelling place unto all generations. . . ."

The wheelbarrows were loaded at last, and New Covenant marched off alongside the coolies who were pushing them. The last instructions were given for the distribution of furniture and remaining possessions. In the little dining-room, overflowing to the bedroom adjoining, was gathered a group of people; Stephen and his wife and Mr. Fan; some of the men from South street, and women from the Street of the Oilhouse; others; familiar friends, fellow pilgrims; they stood and prayed, for the time of parting had come. A last, wordless look at Sister Lee, leaning heavily against the kitchen doorpost; out into the garden, and towards the gate; an interruption from Mrs. Deng who, with perfect self-control and diligence to perform her self-appointed duty to the last, said firmly, "Wait one moment, Teacher. There is an affair that is not settled properly yet," and counted out some money which had been received for something just sold; through the bare chapel, across the church courtyard, through the preaching chapel and out on to the street. "Goodbye, goodbye. Please don't come with us. . . ." "Goodbye, Teacher . . ." and Mrs. Han turned back. Then down the familiar North Street, with its avenue of old trees, Grace pushing one bicycle, and the tall deacon's schoolboy son pushing the other.

"Grace—please go back. Your mother. . . . Please don't come with us any more. . . ." But for once Grace refused to obey. She was going with the missionaries outside the gate of the North Suburb, whatever happened. They walked on, through the city gate, along the bumpy, uneven road that led through the North Suburb.

Would they see Mrs. Yen? wondered one of the missionaries. They could not wait to visit her—would she be in her accustomed place, seated on her little chair before the low square table on which she rolled out the round bread

biscuits that were baked in the charcoal stove beside her. Mrs Yen—the dumpy, forthright mother of a family that alternately delighted and exasperated her, the woman with whom they had gone through a mental anguish that had threatened to overcome them when, with their approval and support, she had rescued a girl from falling into the hands of an evil guerrilla officer. Neither she nor they would ever forget the horror of those days when the powerful officer carried her off to his headquarters, tortured her, demanding that the girl be delivered to him, and finally eliciting from her the promise that if the girl could not be found, her own daughter should be given instead. Nor would they forget the wonder of the deliverance that the God Who said, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and hidden things that thou knowest not," wrought at what seemed like the eleventh hour. Would they see her now?

Yes, she was there. She rose smiling, came towards them, asking the formal question as to where they were going.

"To Chowkiakow," they answered. There must have been something unusual and tense about their manner, for she suddenly looked alarmed, and asked quickly,

"Are you coming back?"

"We don't know," they answered simply. The situation dawned on her.

"I didn't know," she said, looking from one to the other. "Nobody told me. . . ."

"Goodbye, Mrs. Yen," they said. "We must go now, or we shan't reach Chowkiakow to-night."

She looked at them, bewildered, as they walked on, then cried out suddenly, "But wait a minute. . . ." She must *do* something. Quickly she gathered up half a dozen of the round bread biscuits, and, running after them, thrust them into their hands. "Here, take these . . . to eat on the way. . . . I didn't know. . . ."

Out of the North Suburb, on to the open road. Not until then would Grace relinquish her hold of the bicycle she was wheeling. She stood there, with the tall deacon's little son, watching them as they mounted their bicycles and rode off.

When they got out of sight of her, the two missionaries got off their bicycles, laid them down, and sat on a mound by the side of the road. They buried their heads in their hands, and turned again, tearless and wordless, to the One who has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

". . . Lord . . . bless them . . . help them. . . . Thou art the Good Shepherd . . . keep them. . . ."

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD, AND KNOW MY SHEEP, AND AM KNOWN OF MINE. . . . MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE, AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME: AND I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE; AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH, NEITHER SHALL ANY MAN PLUCK THEM OUT OF MY HAND. MY FATHER WHICH GAVE THEM ME IS GREATER THAN ALL; AND NO MAN IS ABLE TO PLUCK THEM OUT OF MY FATHER'S HAND. . . ."

After a while the missionaries stood up, mounted their bicycles again, and rode away.

CHINA INLAND MISSION

HOME CENTRES

EUROPE

ENGLAND—

London, N.16, *Newington Green.*

SCOTLAND—

Glasgow, W.2, 16 *Belmont Street.*

IRELAND—

Belfast, 23 *Rugby Road.*

NORTH AMERICA

CANADA—

Toronto, 5, Ont., 150 *St. George Street.*
Vancouver, B.C., 1646 *Eleventh Avenue, W.*

UNITED STATES—

Philadelphia, Pa., 235–237 *W. School Lane, Germantown.*
Los Angeles, Calif., 238 *South Avenue*, 51.

AUSTRALASIA

AUSTRALIA—

Melbourne, 64 *Elizabeth Street.*
Sydney, 68 *Cambridge Street, Stanmore.*

NEW ZEALAND—

Auckland, 8 *Charlton Avenue, Mt. Eden.*
Dunedin, *P.O. Box* 41.

SOUTH AFRICA—

Cape Town, 3 *Progress Lane.*