

A RETROSPECT

BY

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“Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord
thy God led thee.”

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CHINA INLAND MISSION

CHAPTER I

THE POWER OF PRAYER

THE following account of some of the experiences which eventually led to the formation of the CHINA INLAND MISSION, and to its taking the form in which it has been developed, first appeared in the pages of *China's Millions*. Many of those who read it there asked that it might appear in separate form. Miss Guinness incorporated it in the *Story of the China Inland Mission*, a record which contained the account of GOD'S goodness to the beginning of 1894. But friends still asking for it in pamphlet form, for wider distribution, this edition is brought out.

Much of the material was taken from notes of addresses given in China during a conference of our missionaries; this will account for the direct and narrative form of the papers, which it has not been thought necessary to change.

It is always helpful to us to fix our attention on the GOD-ward aspect of Christian work; to realise that the work of GOD does not mean so much man's work for GOD, as GOD'S own work through man. Furthermore, in our privileged position of fellow-workers with Him, while fully recognising all the benefits and blessings to be bestowed on a sin-stricken world through the proclamation of the Gospel and spread of the Truth, we should never lose sight of the higher aspect of our work—that of obedience to God, of bringing glory to His Name, of gladdening the heart of our GOD and FATHER by living and serving as His beloved children.

Many circumstances connected with my own early life and service presented this aspect of work vividly to me; and as I think of some of them, I am reminded of how much the cause of missions is indebted to many who are never themselves permitted to see the mission field—many, it may be, who are unable to give largely of their substance, and who will be not a little surprised in the Great Day to see how much the work has been advanced by their love, their sympathy, and their prayers.

For myself, and for the work that I have been permitted to do for GOD, I owe an unspeakable debt of gratitude to my beloved and honoured parents, who have passed away and entered into rest, but the influence of whose lives will never pass away.

Many years ago, probably about 1830, the heart of my dear father, then himself an earnest and successful evangelist at home, was deeply stirred as to the spiritual state of China by reading several books, and especially an account of the travels of Captain Basil Hall. His circumstances were such as to preclude the hope of his ever going to China for personal service, but he was led to pray that if God should give him a son, he might be called and

privileged to labour in the vast needy empire which was then apparently so sealed against the truth. I was not aware of this desire or prayer myself until my return to England, more than seven years after I had sailed for China; but it was very interesting then to know how prayer offered before my birth had been answered in this matter.

All thought of my becoming a missionary was abandoned for many years by my dear parents on account of the feebleness of my health. When the time came, however, God gave increased health, and my life has been spared, and strength has been given for not a little toilsome service both in the mission field and at home, while many stronger men and women have succumbed.

I had many opportunities in early years of learning the value of prayer and of the Word of God; for it was the delight of my dear parents to point out that if there were any such Being as GOD, to trust Him, to obey Him, and to be fully given up to His service, must of necessity be the best and wisest course both for myself and others. But in spite of these helpful examples and precepts my heart was unchanged. Often I had tried to make myself a Christian; and failing of course in such efforts, I began at last to think that for some reason or other I could not be saved, and that the best I could do was to take my fill of this world, as there was no hope for me beyond the grave.

While in this state of mind I came in contact with persons holding sceptical and infidel views, and accepted their teaching, only too thankful for some hope of escape from the doom which, if my parents were right and the Bible true, awaited the impenitent. It may seem strange to say it, but I have often felt thankful for the experience of this time of scepticism. The inconsistencies of Christian people, who while professing to believe their Bibles were yet content to live just as they would if there were no such book, had been one of the strongest arguments of my sceptical companions; and I frequently felt at that time, and said, that if I pretended to believe the Bible I would at any rate attempt to live by it, putting it fairly to the test, and if it failed to prove true and reliable, would throw it overboard altogether. These views I retained when the Lord was pleased to bring me to Himself; and I think I may say that since then I have put God's Word to the test. Certainly it has never failed me. I have never had reason to regret the confidence I have placed in its promises, or to deplore following the guidance I have found in its directions.

Let me tell you how GOD answered the prayers of my dear mother and of my beloved sister, now Mrs. Broomhall, for my conversion. On a day which I shall never forget, when I was about fifteen years of age, my dear mother being absent from home, I had a holiday, and in the afternoon looked

through my father's library to find some book with which to while away the unoccupied hours. Nothing attracting me, I turned over a little basket of pamphlets, and selected from amongst them a Gospel tract which looked interesting, saying to myself, "There will be a story at the commencement, and a sermon or moral at the close: I will take the former and leave the latter for those who like it."

I sat down to read the little book in an utterly unconcerned state of mind, believing indeed at the time that if there were any salvation it was not for me, and with a distinct intention to put away the tract as soon as it should seem prosy. I may say that it was not uncommon in those days to call conversion "becoming serious"; and judging by the faces of some of its professors, it appeared to be a very serious matter indeed. Would it not be well if the people of God had always tell-tale faces, evincing the blessings and gladness of salvation so clearly that unconverted people might have to call conversion "becoming joyful" instead of "becoming serious"?

Little did I know at the time what was going on in the heart of my dear mother, seventy or eighty miles away. She rose from the dinner-table that afternoon with an intense yearning for the conversion of her boy, and feeling that—absent from home, and having more leisure than she could otherwise secure—a special opportunity was afforded her of pleading with GOD on my behalf. She went to her room and turned the key in the door, resolved not to leave that spot until her prayers were answered. Hour after hour did that dear mother plead for me, until at length she could pray no longer, but was constrained to praise GOD for that which His SPIRIT taught her had already been accomplished—the conversion of her only son.

I in the meantime had been led in the way I have mentioned to take up this little tract, and while reading it was struck with the sentence, "The finished work of CHRIST." The thought passed through my mind, "Why does the author use this expression? why not say the atoning or propitiatory work of CHRIST?" Immediately the words "It is finished" suggested themselves to my mind. What was finished? And I at once replied, "A full and perfect atonement and satisfaction for sin: the debt was paid by the Substitute; CHRIST died for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Then came the thought, "If the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?" And with this dawned the joyful conviction, as light was flashed into my soul by the HOLY SPIRIT, that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on one's knees, and accepting this SAVIOUR and His salvation, to praise Him for evermore. Thus while my dear mother was praising GOD on her knees in her chamber, I was praising Him in the old warehouse to which I had gone alone to read at my leisure this little book.

Several days elapsed ere I ventured to make my beloved sister the confidante of my joy, and then only after she had promised not to tell any one of my soul secret.

When our dear mother came home a fortnight later, I was the first to meet her at the door, and to tell her I had such glad news to give. I can almost feel that dear mother's arms around my neck, as she pressed me to her bosom and said, "I know, my boy; I have been rejoicing for a fortnight in the glad tidings you have to tell me." "Why," I asked in surprise, "has Amelia broken her promise? She said she would tell no one." My dear mother assured me that it was not from any human source that she had learned the tidings, and went on to tell the little incident mentioned above. You will agree with me that it would be strange indeed if I were not a believer in the power of prayer.

Nor was this all. Some little time after, I picked up a pocket-book exactly like one of my own, and thinking that it was mine, opened it. The lines that caught my eye were an entry in the little diary, which belonged to my sister, to the effect that she would give herself daily to prayer until God should answer in the conversion of her brother. Exactly one month later the LORD was pleased to turn me from darkness to light.

Brought up in such a circle and saved under such circumstances, it was perhaps natural that from the commencement of my Christian life I was led to feel that the promises were very real, and that prayer was in sober matter of fact transacting business with God, whether on one's own behalf or on behalf of those for whom one sought His blessing.