

A RETROSPECT

BY

J. HUDSON TAYLOR, M.R.C.S., F.R.G.S.

“Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord
thy God led thee....” Deut. viii. 2.

THIRD EDITION

TORONTO

CHINA INLAND MISSION

CHAPTER X

FIRST EVANGELISTIC EFFORTS

A JOURNEY taken in the spring of 1855 with the Rev. J. S. Burdon of the Church Missionary Society (now the Bishop of Victoria, Hong-Kong) was attended with some serious dangers.

In the great mouth of the river Yang-tse, distant some thirty miles to the north of Shanghai, lies the group of islands of which Ts'ung-ming and Haimen are the largest and most important; and farther up the river, where the estuary narrows away from the sea, is situated the influential city of T'ungchau, close to Lang-shan, or the Wolf Mountains, famous as a resort for pilgrim devotees. We spent some time in evangelising on those islands, and then proceeded to Lang-shan, where we preached and gave books to thousands of the devotees who were attending an idolatrous festival. From thence we went on to T'ungchau, and of our painful experiences there the following journal will tell:—

Thursday, April 26th, 1855.

After breakfast we commended ourselves to the care of our Heavenly FATHER, and sought His blessing before proceeding to this great city. The day was dull and wet. We felt persuaded that Satan would not allow us to assail his kingdom, as we were attempting to do, without raising serious opposition; but we were also fully assured that it was the will of GOD that we should preach CHRIST in this city, and distribute the Word of Truth among its people. We were sorry that we had but few books left for such an important place: the result, however, proved that this also was providential.

Our native teachers did their best to persuade us not to go into the city; but we determined that, by GOD'S help, nothing should hinder us. We directed them, however, to remain in one of the boats; and if we did not return, to learn whatever they could respecting our fate, and make all possible haste to Shanghai with the information. We also arranged that the other boat should wait for us, even if we could not get back that night, so that we might not be detained for want of a boat in case of returning later. We then put our books into two bags, and with a servant who always accompanied us on these occasions, set off for the city, distant about seven miles. Walking was out of the question, from the state of the roads, so we availed ourselves of wheel-barrows, the only conveyance to be had in these parts. A wheelbarrow is cheaper than a sedan, only requiring one coolie; but is by no means an agreeable conveyance on rough, dirty roads.

We had not gone far before the servant requested permission to go back, as he was thoroughly frightened by reports concerning the native soldiery. Of course we at once consented, not wishing to involve another in trouble, and determined to carry the books ourselves, and look for physical as well as spiritual strength to Him who had promised to supply all our need.

At this point a respectable man came up, and earnestly warned us against proceeding, saying that if we did we should find to our sorrow what the T'ung-chau militia were like. We thanked him for his kindly counsel, but could not act upon it, as our hearts were fixed. Whether it were to bonds, imprisonment, and death, or whether to distribute our Scriptures and tracts in safety, and return unhurt, we knew not; but we were determined, by the grace of God not to leave T'ung-chau any longer without the Gospel, nor its teeming thousands to die in uncared-for ignorance of the Way of life.

After this my wheel-barrow man would proceed no farther, and I had to seek another, who was fortunately not difficult to find. As we went on, the ride in the mud and rain was anything but agreeable, and we could not help feeling the danger of our position, although wavering not for a moment. At intervals we encouraged one another with promises from the Scripture and verses of hymns. That verse—

“The perils of the sea, the perils of the land,
Should not dishearten thee: thy LORD is nigh at hand.
But should thy courage fail, when tried and sore oppressed,
His promise shall avail, and set thy soul at rest.”

—seemed particularly appropriate to our circumstances, and was very comforting to me.

On our way we passed through one small town of about a thousand inhabitants; and here, in the Mandarin dialect, I preached JESUS to a good number of people. Never was I so happy in speaking of the love of GOD and the atonement of JESUS CHRIST. My own soul was richly blessed, and filled with joy and peace; and I was able to speak with unusual freedom and ease. And how rejoiced I was when, afterwards, I heard one of our hearers repeating to the newcomers, in his own local dialect, the truths upon which I had been dwelling! Oh, how thankful I felt to hear a Chinaman, of his own accord, telling his fellow-countrymen that GOD loved them; that they were sinners, but that JESUS died instead of them, and paid the penalty of their guilt. That one moment repaid me for all the trials we had passed through; and I felt that if the LORD should grant His HOLY SPIRIT to change the heart of that man, we had not come in vain.

We distributed a few Testaments and tracts, for the people were able to read, and we could not leave them without the Gospel. It was well that we

did so, for when we reached T'ung-chau we found we had quite as many left as we had strength to carry.

Nearing the end of our journey, as we approached the western suburb of the city, the prayer of the early Christians, when persecution was commencing, came to my mind: "And now, LORD, behold their threatenings, and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word." In this petition we most heartily united. Before entering the suburb we laid our plans, so as to act in concert, and told our wheel-barrow men where to await us, that they might not be involved in any trouble on our account. Then looking up to our Heavenly FATHER, we committed ourselves to His keeping, took our books, and set off for the city.

For some distance we walked along the principal street of the suburb leading to the West Gate unmolested, and were amused at the unusual title of Heh-kwei-tsi (black devils) which was applied to us. We wondered about it at the time, but afterwards found that it was our clothes, and not our skin, that gave rise to it. As we passed several of the soldiers, I remarked to Mr. Burdon that these were the men we had heard so much about, and that they seemed willing to receive us quietly enough. Long before we reached the gate, however, a tall powerful man, made tenfold fiercer by partial intoxication, let us know that all the militia were not so peaceably inclined, by seizing Mr. Burdon by the shoulders. My companion endeavoured to shake him off. I turned to see what was the matter, and at once we were surrounded by a dozen or more brutal men, who hurried us on to the city at a fearful pace.

My bag now began to feel very heavy, and I could not change hands to relieve myself. I was soon in a profuse perspiration, and was scarcely able to keep pace with them. We demanded to be taken before the chief magistrate, but were told that they knew where to take us, and what to do with such persons as we were, with the most insulting epithets. The man who first seized Mr. Burdon soon afterwards left him for me, and became my principal tormentor; for I was neither so tall nor so strong as my friend, and was therefore less able to resist him. He all but knocked me down again and again, seized me by the hair, took hold of my collar so as to almost choke me, and grasped my arms and shoulders, making them black and blue. Had this treatment continued much longer, I must have fainted. All but exhausted, how refreshing was the remembrance of a verse quoted by my dear mother in one of my last home letters—

"We speak of the realms of the blest,
That country so bright and so fair,
And oft are its glories confessed;
But what must it be to be there!"

To be absent from the body! to be present with the LORD! to be free from sin! And this is the end of the worst that man's malice can ever bring upon us.

As we were walking along Mr. Burdon tried to give away a few books that he was carrying, not knowing whether we might have another opportunity of doing so; but the fearful rage of the soldier, and the way he insisted on manacles being brought, which fortunately were not at hand, convinced us that in our present position we could do no good in attempting book-distribution. There was nothing to be done but quietly to submit, and go along with our captors.

Once or twice a quarrel arose as to how we should be dealt with; the more mild of our conductors saying that we ought to be taken to the magistrate's office, but others wishing to kill us at once without appeal to any authority. Our minds were kept in perfect peace; and when thrown together on one of these occasions, we reminded each other that the Apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer in the cause of CHRIST. Having succeeded in getting my hand into my pocket, I produced a Chinese card (if the large red paper, bearing one's name, may be so called), and after this was treated with more respect. I demanded it should be given to the chief official of the place, and that we should be led to his office. Before this we had been unable, say what we would, to persuade them that we were foreigners, although we were both in English attire.

Oh the long weary streets that we were dragged through! I thought they would never end; and seldom have I felt more thankful than when we stopped at a place where we were told a mandarin resided. Quite exhausted, bathed in perspiration, and with my tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth, I leaned against the wall, and saw that Mr. Burdon was in much the same condition. I requested them to bring us chairs, but they told us to wait; and when I begged them to give us some tea, received only the same answer. Round the doorway a large crowd had gathered; and Mr. Burdon, collecting his remaining strength, preached CHRIST JESUS to them. Our cards and books had been taken in to the mandarin, but he proved to be one of low rank, and after keeping us waiting for some time he referred us to his superiors in office.

Upon hearing this, and finding that it was their purpose to turn us out again into the crowded streets, we positively refused to move a single step, and insisted on chairs being brought. After some demur this was done; we seated ourselves in them, and were carried off. On the road we felt so glad of the rest which the chairs afforded us, and so thankful at having been able to preach JESUS in spite of Satan's malice, that our joy was depicted on our countenances; and as we passed along we heard some say that we did not

look like bad men, while others seemed to pity us. When we arrived at the magistrate's office, I wondered where we were being taken; for though we passed through some great gates that looked like those of the city wall, we were still evidently within the city. A second pair of gates suggested the idea that it was a prison into which we were being carried; but when we came in sight of a large tablet, with the inscription "Ming chi fu mu" (the father and mother of the people), we felt that we had been conveyed to the right place; this being the title assumed by the mandarins.

Our cards were again sent in, and after a short delay we were taken into the presence of Ch'en 'Fa Lao-ie (the Great Venerable Father Ch'en), who, as it proved, had formerly been Tao-tai of Shanghai, and consequently knew the importance of treating foreigners with courtesy. Coming before him, some of the people fell on their knees and bowed down to the ground, and my conductor motioned for me to do the same, but without success. This mandarin, who seemed to be the highest authority of T'ung-chau, and wore an opaque blue button on his cap, came out to meet us, and treated us with every possible token of respect. He took us to an inner apartment, a more private room, but was followed by a large number of writers, runners, and other semi-officials. I related the object of our visit, and begged permission to give him copies of our books and tracts, for which he thanked me. As I handed him a copy of the New Testament with part of the Old (from Genesis to Ruth) and some tracts, I tried to explain a little about them, and also to give him a brief summary of our teachings. . . . He listened very attentively, as of course did all the others present. He then ordered some refreshments to be brought in, which were very welcome, and himself partook of them with us.

After a long stay, we asked permission to see something of the city, and to distribute the books we had brought, before our return. To this he kindly consented. We then mentioned that we had been most disrespectfully treated as we came in, but that we did not attach much importance to the fact, being aware that the soldiers knew no better. Not desiring, however, to have such an experience repeated, we requested him to give orders that we were not to be further molested. This also he promised to do, and with every possible token of respect accompanied us to the door of his official residence, sending several runners to see that we were respectfully treated. We distributed our books well and quickly, and left the city quite in state. It was amusing to us to see the way in which the runners made use of their tails. When the street was blocked by the crowd, they turned them into whips, and laid them about the people's shoulders to right and left. We had a little trouble in finding our wheel-barrow; but eventually succeeding, we paid off the chair coolies, mounted our humble vehicles, and returned to the river, accompa-

nied for fully half the distance by an attendant from the magistrate's office. Early in the evening we got back to the boats in safety, sincerely thankful to our Heavenly FATHER for His gracious protection and aid.