

# A RETROSPECT

BY

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

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CHINA INLAND MISSION

## CHAPTER XI

WITH THE REV. WILLIAM BURNS

**A**FTER the retaking of Shanghai by the Imperialists, in February 1855, I was enabled to rent a house within the walls of the native city, and gladly availed myself of this opportunity to reside amidst the crowded population left to inhabit the ruins that had survived the war. Here I made my headquarters, though often absent on more or less prolonged itinerations.

At the suggestion of the Rev. Dr. Medhurst, the veteran leader of the London Mission, I was led at about this period to adopt the native costume in preference to foreign dress, to facilitate travel and residence inland. The Chinese had permitted a foreign firm to build a silk factory some distance inland, with the proviso that the style of building must be purely Chinese, and that there should be nothing external to suggest that it was foreign. Much benefit was found to result from this change of costume; and I, and most of those associated with me, have continued to use native dress.

The T'ai-p'ing rebellion, commenced in 1851, had by this time reached the height of its ephemeral success. The great city of Nan-king had fallen before the invading host; and there, within two hundred miles of Shanghai, the rebels had established their headquarters, and proceeded to fortify themselves for further conquests. During the summer of 1855 various attempts were made to visit the leaders of the movement, in order to bring to bear some decidedly Christian influence upon them; but so little success was met with, that these efforts were abandoned.

I, amongst others, had sought to reach Nan-king; but finding it impossible to do so, turned my attention again to evangelistic work on the island of Ts'ung-ming. After some time I was enabled so far to overcome the prejudice and fears of the people as to rent a little house and settle down in their midst. This was a great joy and encouragement to me; but before many weeks were over complaints were made by the local authorities to the British Consul, who compelled me to retire; though the French Consul had himself secured to the Romish missionaries a property within three or four miles of the house I had to vacate. Sorely tried and disappointed by this unexpected hindrance, I reluctantly returned to Shanghai, little dreaming of the blessing that GOD had in store for me there.

A few months previously the Rev. William Burns, of the English Presbyterian Mission, had arrived in that port on his return journey from home; and before proceeding to his former sphere of service in the southern province of FU-KIEN, he had endeavoured, like myself, without success, to visit the T'ai-p'ing rebels at Nan-king. Failing in this attempt, he made his headquar-

ters in Shanghai for a season, devoting himself to the evangelisation of the surrounding populous regions. Thus in the autumn of the year I was providentially led into association with this beloved and honoured servant of GOD.

We journeyed together, evangelising cities and towns in southern KIANG-SU and north CHEH-KIANG, living in our boats, and following the course of the canals and rivers which here spread like a network over the whole face of the rich and fertile country. Mr. Burns at that time was wearing English dress; but saw that while I was the younger and in every way less experienced, I had the quiet hearers, while he was followed by the rude boys, and by the curious but careless; that I was invited to the homes of the people, while he received an apology that the crowd that would follow precluded his being invited. After some weeks of observation he also adopted the native dress, and enjoyed the increased facilities which it gave.

Those happy months were an unspeakable joy and privilege to me. His love for the Word was delightful, and his holy, reverential life and constant communings with GOD made fellowship with him satisfying to the deep cravings of my heart. His accounts of revival work and of persecutions in Canada, and Dublin, and in Southern China were most instructive, as well as interesting; for with true spiritual insight he often pointed out GOD'S purposes in trial in a way that made all life assume quite a new aspect and value. His views especially about evangelism as the great work of the Church, and the order of lay evangelists as a lost order that Scripture required to be restored, were seed-thoughts which were to prove fruitful in the subsequent organisation of the China Inland Mission.

Externally, however, our path was not always a smooth one; but when permitted to stay for any length of time in town or city, the opportunity was well utilised. We were in the habit of leaving our boats, after prayer for blessing, at about nine o'clock in the morning, with a light bamboo stool in hand. Selecting a suitable station, one would mount the stool and speak for twenty minutes, while the other was pleading for blessing; and then changing places, the voice of the first speaker had a rest. After an hour or two thus occupied, we would move on to another point at some distance from the first, and speak again. Usually about midday we returned to our boats for dinner, fellowship, and prayer, and then resumed our outdoor work until dusk. After tea and further rest, we would go with our native helpers to some tea-shop, where several hours might be spent in free conversation with the people. Not infrequently before leaving a town we had good reason to believe that much truth had been grasped; and we placed many Scriptures and books in the hands of those interested.

The following letter was written by Mr. Burns to his mother at home in Scotland about this time:—

“TWENTY-FIVE MILES FROM SHANGHAI,

“January 26th, 1856.

“Taking advantage of a rainy day which confines me to my boat, I pen a few lines, in addition to a letter to Dundee, containing particulars which I need not repeat. It is now forty-one days since I left Shanghai on this last occasion. A young English missionary, Mr. Taylor, of the Chinese Evangelisation Society, has been my companion during these weeks—he in his boat, and I in mine—and we have experienced much mercy, and on some occasions considerable assistance in our work.

“I must once more tell the story I have had to tell already more than once—how four weeks ago, on December 29th, I put on the Chinese dress, which I am now wearing. Mr. Taylor had made this change a few months before, and I found that he was, in consequence, so much less incommoded in preaching, etc., by the crowd, that I concluded it was my duty to follow his example. We were at that time more than double the distance from Shanghai that we are now, and would still have been at as great a distance had we not met at one place with a band of lawless people, who demanded money and threatened to break our boats if their demands were refused. The boatmen were very much alarmed, and insisted on returning to some place nearer home. These people had previously broken in, violently, a part of Mr. Taylor’s boat, because their unreasonable demand for books was not complied with.

“We have a large, very large, field of labour in this region, though it might be difficult in the meantime for one to establish himself in any particular place; the people listen with attention, but we need the Power from on High to convince and convert. Is there any spirit of prayer on our behalf among GOD’S people in Kilsyth? or is there any effort to seek this spirit? How great the need is, and how great the arguments and motives for prayer in this case. The harvest here is indeed great, and the labourers are few, and imperfectly fitted without much grace for such a work. And yet grace can make the few and feeble instruments the means of accomplishing great things, things greater than we can even conceive.”

The incident referred to in this letter, which led to our return to Shanghai more speedily than we had at first intended, took place on the northern border of CHEH-KIANG. We had reached a busy market town known by the name of Wu-chen, or Flack Town, the inhabitants of which, we had been told, were the wildest and most lawless people in that part of the country. Such indeed we found them to be: the town was a refuge for salt smugglers and other bad characters. The following extracts are taken from my journal, written at the time:—

*January 8th, 1856.*

Commenced our work in Wu-chen this morning by distributing a large number of tracts and some Testaments. The people seemed much surprised, and we could not learn that any foreigner had been here before. We preached twice—once in the temple of the God of War, and afterwards in an empty space left by a fire, which had completely destroyed many houses. In the afternoon we preached again to a large and attentive audience on the same site; and in the evening adjourned to a tea-shop, where we had a good opportunity of speaking until it got noised abroad that we were there, when, too many people coming in, we were obliged to leave. Our native assistants, Tsien and Kuei-hua, were able, however, to remain. Returning to our boats, we spoke to a number of people standing on a bridge, and felt we had abundant reason to be thankful and encouraged by the result of our first day's labour.

*January 10th.*

First sent Tsien and Kuei-hua to distribute some sheet tracts. After their return we went with them, and in a space cleared by fire we separated, and addressed two audiences. On our return to the boats for lunch, we found people waiting, as usual, and desiring books. Some were distributed to those who were able to read them; and then asking them kindly to excuse us while we took our midday meal, I went into my boat and shut the door.

Hardly was there time to pour out a cup of tea when a battering began, and the roof was at once broken in. I went out at the back, and found four or five men taking the large lumps of frozen earth turned up in a field close by—weighing, I should suppose, from seven to fourteen pounds each—and throwing them at the boat. Remonstrance was of no avail, and it was not long ere a considerable part of the upper structure of the boat was broken to pieces, and a quantity of earth covered the things inside. Finally, Tsien got a boat that was passing to land him at a short distance, and by a few tracts drew away the attention of the men, thus ending the assault.

We now learned that of those who had done the mischief only two were natives of the place, the others being salt smugglers, and that the cause was our not having satisfied their unreasonable demand for books.

Most providentially no one was injured; and as soon as quiet was somewhat restored, we all met in Mr. Burns's boat and joined in thanksgiving that we had been preserved from personal harm, praying also for the perpetrators of the mischief, and that it might be over-ruled for good to us and to those with us. We then took our lunch and went on shore, and but a few steps from the boats addressed a large multitude that soon assembled. We

were specially assisted; never were we heard with more attention, and not one voice was found to sympathise with the men who had molested us. In the evening, at the tea-shops, the same spirit was manifested, and some seemed to hear with joy the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified and risen SAVIOUR.

As we came home we passed a barber's shop still open, and I went in, and while getting my head shaved had an opportunity of speaking to a few people, and afterwards pasted a couple of sheet tracts on the wall for the benefit of future customers.

*January 11th.*

A respectable shop-keeper of the name of Yao, who on the first or second day of our stay at Wu-chen had received portions of the New Testament and a tract, came yesterday, when our boat was broken, to beg for some more books. At that time we were all in confusion from the damage done, and from the earth thrown into the boat, and so invited him to come again in a day or two's time, when we would gladly supply him. This morning he appeared and handed in the following note:—

“On a former day I begged Burns and Taylor, the two ‘*Rabbis*,’ to give me good books. It happened at that time those of our town whose hearts were deceived by *Satan*, not knowing the *Son of David*, went so far as to dare to ‘*raca*’ and ‘*moreh*’ and injure your respected boat.

I thank you for promising afterwards to give the books, and beg the following: Complete New Testament, ‘Discourse of a Good Man when near his Death,’ ‘Important Christian Doctrines,’ an Almanack, ‘Principles of Christianity,’ ‘Way to make the World happy,’—of each one copy. Sung and Tsien, and all teachers I hope are well. Further compliments are unwritten.”

This note is interesting, as showing that he had been reading the New Testament attentively, as the italicised words were all taken from it. His use of “*raca*” and “*moreh*” for reviling, shows their meaning was not lost upon him.

After supplying this man, we went out with Tsien and Kuei-hua to the east of the town, and spoke in the street for a short time. Upon returning to the boats, I was visited by two CHIH-LI men, who are in the magistrate's office here. I was greatly helped in speaking to them of a crucified SAVIOUR in the Mandarin dialect; and though one of them did not pay much attention, the other did, and made inquiries that showed the interest he was feeling. When they had left, I went on shore and spoke to the people collected there,

to whom Kuei-hua had been preaching. The setting sun afforded a parable, and reminded one of the words of JESUS, "The night cometh, when no man can work;" and as I spoke of the uncertain duration of this life, and of our ignorance as to the time of CHRIST'S return, a degree of deep seriousness prevailed that I had never previously witnessed in China. I engaged in prayer, and the greatest decorum was observed. I then returned to my boat with a Buddhist priest who had been in the audience, and he admitted that Buddhism was a system of deceit that could give no hope in death.

*January 12th.*

In the afternoon we addressed the people on shore close to our boats, also in one of the streets of the city, and in a tea-shop, books being distributed on each occasion. In the evening we went as usual to speak in the tea-shops, but determined to go to the opposite end of the town, in order to afford those who lived there a better opportunity of meeting with us. It was a long straggling place, nearly two English miles in length. As Mr. Burns and I were accustomed to talk together in Chinese, this conclusion was known to those in the boats.

After we had proceeded a short distance we changed our minds, and went instead to the usual tea-shop, thinking that persons might have gone there expecting to meet us. But this was not the case; and we did not find such serious hearers as we had done on previous occasions. On this account Mr. Burns proposed leaving earlier than usual, and we did so, telling Tsien and Kuei-hua that they might remain a little longer. Returning to the boats, we gave away a few books; but, singularly enough, were left to go alone, no one accompanying us, as is so generally the case. Instead of being a clear night, as it was when we started, we found that it had become intensely dark. On our way we met the boatman, whose manner seemed very strange, and without giving us any explanation he blew out the candle of our lantern; we relighted the lantern, telling him not to put it out again, when to our surprise he deliberately removed the candle and threw it into the canal. He then walked down along a low wall jutting out to the river's edge, and gazed into the water.

Not knowing what was the matter with him, I ran forward to hold him, fearful lest he were going to drown himself; but to my great relief he came quietly back. In answer to our repeated questions he told us not to speak, for some bad men were seeking to destroy the boats, and they had moved away to avoid them. He then led us to the place where one of them was lying. Before long Tsien and Kuei-hua came and got safely on board, and soon after we were joined by the teacher Sung, and the boat moved away.

The cause of all this disturbance was then explained. A man professing to be the constable had come to the boats in our absence, with a written demand for ten dollars and a quantity of opium. He stated that there were more than fifty country people (salt smugglers) awaiting our reply in an adjoining tea-shop; and if we gave them what they wanted, and three hundred cash to pay for their tea, we might remain in peace; but that if not, they would come at once and destroy our boats. Sung told them that we could not comply with their demand; for, not being engaged in trade, but only in preaching and book-distribution, we had not an atom of opium, and that our money was nearly all expended. The man, however, told him plainly that he did not believe him, and Sung had no alternative but to seek us out, desiring the man to await our reply. Not knowing that we had changed our plans, he sought us in the wrong direction, and of course in vain.

In the meanwhile the boatmen had succeeded in moving off. They were very much alarmed; and having so recently had proof of what these men would do in open daylight, felt no desire to experience what they might attempt by night. Moving away, therefore, they had separated, so that if one boat should be injured the other might afford us a refuge. It was after this that we had providentially met the boatman, and had been safely led on board. As Sung repassed the place where we were previously moored, he saw between the trees a dozen or more men, and heard them inquiring where the boats had gone to; but no one could tell. Fortunately they sought in vain.

After a while the two boats joined, and rowed together for some time. It was already late, and to travel by night in that part of the country was not the way to avoid danger from evil men; so the question arose as to what should be done. This we left for the boatmen to decide; they had moved off of their own accord, and we felt that whatever we personally might desire we could not constrain others to remain in a position of danger on our account. We urged them, however, to do quickly whatever they intended to do, as the morrow was the LORD'S DAY, when we should not wish to travel. We also informed them that wherever we were we must fulfil our mission, and preach the Gospel; it therefore made but little difference where we might stay, for even if we passed the night unperceived, we were sure to be found out on the following morning. The men consequently concluded that we might as well return to the place from which we had started; to this we fully agreed, and they turned back accordingly. But—whether by accident or no we could not tell—they got into another stream, and rowed for some time they knew not whither. At last, as it was very dark, they moored for the night.

We then called all the boatmen together, with our native assistants, and read to them the ninety-first Psalm. It may be imagined how appropriate to our position and need and how sweetly consoling was this portion of GOD'S Word:—

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the MOST HIGH  
Shall abide under the shadow of the ALMIGHTY.  
I will say of the LORD, *He* is my refuge and my fortress:  
My GOD; in Him will I trust.

“Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,  
And from the noisome pestilence.  
He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust:  
His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.  
Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night;  
Nor for the arrow that flieth by day.

“Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him.  
I will set him on high, because he hath known My Name. He shall call upon  
Me, and I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble;—I will deliver him, and honour him.  
With long life will I satisfy him,—and show him My salvation.”

Committing ourselves in prayer to His care and keeping Who had covered us with thick darkness and permitted us to escape from the hand of the violent, we retired for the night; which—thanks to the kind protection of the WATCHMAN OF ISRAEL, who neither slumbers nor forgets His people—we passed in peace and quietness, and were enabled, in some measure, to realise the truth of that precious word, “Thou art my Hiding-place, and my Shield.”

*Sunday, January 13th.*

This morning I was awakened about 4 A.M. by violent pain in the knee-joint. I had bruised it the day before, and severe inflammation was the result. To my great surprise I heard the rain pouring down in torrents, the weather having previously been particularly fine. On looking out, we found ourselves so near our former stopping-place, that, had nothing happened to prevent it, we should not have felt justified in neglecting to go into the town to preach as usual; but the rain was so heavy all day that no one could leave the boats. Thus we enjoyed a delightful day of rest, such as we had not had for some time; and the weather prevented much inquiry being made for us. Had the day been fine we should most likely have been discovered, even if we had not left the boats. As it was, we were allowed to think in peace, with

wonder and gratitude, of the gracious dealings of our GOD, who had thus led us apart into “a desert place” to rest awhile.

*Monday, January 14th.*

A cloudless morning. One of the native assistants went before daybreak to get some clothes which had been given out for washing. He came back with the tidings that, notwithstanding the drenching rain of yesterday, men had been seeking us in all directions. We had been kept, however, in peace and safety “under the shadow of the Almighty.”

The boatmen were now so thoroughly alarmed that they would stay no longer, and moved off at dawn. I was confined to my quarters by lameness, and had no alternative but to go with them. In the afternoon we reached Ping-wang, on the way to Shanghai.

“ Ill that GOD blesses is our good,  
And unblest good is ill;  
And all is right that seems most wrong,  
If it be His sweet will.”