

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 XII.

CALLED TO SWATOW.

HAVING to leave the neighbourhood of Black Town thus unexpectedly was a real disappointment to us, as we had hoped to spend some time evangelising in that district. We were to prove, however, that no unforeseen mischance had happened, but that these circumstances which seemed so trying were necessary links in the chain of a divinely ordered providence, guiding to other and wider spheres.

GOD does not permit persecution to arise without sufficient reason. . . . He was leading us by a way that we knew not; but it was none the less His way.

“O LORD, how happy should we be
If we would cast our care on Thee,
If we from self would rest;
And feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best!”

When we reached Shanghai, thinking to return inland in a few days with fresh supplies of books and money, we met a Christian captain who had been trading at Swatow, and he put very strongly before us the need of that region, and the fact that there were British merchants living on Double Island, selling opium and engaged in the coolie trade (practically a slave traffic), while there was no British missionary to preach the Gospel. The SPIRIT OF GOD impressed me with the feeling that this was His call, but for days I felt that I could not obey it. I had never had such a spiritual father as Mr. Burns; I had never known such holy, happy fellowship; and I said to myself that it could not be GOD’S will that we should separate.

In great unrest of soul I went one evening, with Mr. Burns, to take tea at the house of the Rev. R. Lowrie, of the American Presbyterian Mission, at the South Gate of Shanghai. After tea Mrs. Lowrie played over to us “The Missionary Call.” I had never heard it before, and it greatly affected me. My heart was almost broken before it was finished, and I said to the LORD, in the words that had been sung—

“And I will go!
I may no longer doubt to give up friends, and idol hopes,
And every tie that binds my heart. . .
Henceforth, then, it matters not, if storm or sunshine be my earthly lot,
bitter or sweet my cup;

I only pray, GOD, make me holy,
And my spirit nerve for the stern hour of strife.”

Upon leaving I asked Mr. Burns to come home with me to the little house that was still my headquarters in the native city, and there, with many tears, told him how the LORD had been leading me, and how rebellious I had been and unwilling to leave him for this new sphere of labour. He listened with a strange look of surprise, and of pleasure rather than pain; and answered that he had determined that very night to tell me that he had heard the LORD’S call to Swatow, and that his one regret had been the prospect of the severance of our happy fellowship. We went together; and thus was recommenced missionary work in that part of China, which in later years has been so abundantly blessed.

Long before this time the Rev. R. Lechler, of the Basel Missionary Society, had widely itinerated in the neighbourhood of Swatow and the surrounding regions. Driven about from place to place, he had done work that was not forgotten, although ultimately he was obliged to retire to Hong-Kong. For more than forty years this earnest-hearted servant of GOD has continued in “labours more abundant “; and quite recently he has left Hong-Kong, with his devoted wife, to return again inland, and spend the strength of his remaining years amongst the people he has so long and truly loved.

Captain Bowers, the Christian friend who had been used of GOD in bringing the needs of Swatow before Mr. Burns and myself, was overjoyed when he heard of our decision to devote ourselves to the evangelisation of that busy, important, and populous mart. Being about to sail himself on his return journey, he gladly offered us free passages on board the *Geelong*, in which we left Shanghai early in the month of March 1856.

A favourable journey of six days brought us to Double Island, where we found ourselves landed in the midst of a small but very ungodly community of foreigners, engaged in the opium trade and other commercial enterprises. Unwilling to be in any way identified with these fellow-countrymen, we were most desirous of obtaining quarters at once within the native city, situated on a promontory of the mainland, five miles farther up, at the mouth of the Han river. Great difficulty was experienced in this attempt to obtain a footing amongst the people. Indeed, it seemed as though we should fail altogether, and we were helplessly cast upon the LORD in prayer. Our GOD soon undertook for us. Meeting one day with a Cantonese merchant, a relative of the highest official in the town, Mr. Burns addressed him in the Cantonese dialect; this gentleman was so pleased at being spoken to by a foreigner in his own tongue that he became our friend, and secured us a lodging. We had only one little room, however, and not easily shall I forget the long hot summer months in that oven-like place, where towards the eaves

one could touch the heated tiles with one's hand. More room or better accommodation it was impossible to obtain.

We varied our stay by visits to the surrounding country; but the difficulties and dangers that encountered us here were so great and constant, that our former work in the North began to appear safe and easy in comparison. The hatred and contempt of the Cantonese was very painful, "foreign devil," "foreign dog," or "foreign pig" being the commonest appellations; but all this led us into deeper fellowship than I had ever known before with Him who was "despised and rejected of men."

In our visits to the country we were liable to be seized at any time and held to ransom; and the people commonly declared that the whole district was "without emperor, without ruler, and without law." Certainly, might was right in those days. On one occasion we were visiting a small town, and found that the inhabitants had captured a wealthy man of another clan. A large ransom was demanded for his release, and on his refusing to pay it they had smashed his ankle-bones, one by one, with a club, and thus extorted the promise they desired. There was nothing but GOD'S protection to prevent our being treated in the same way. The towns were all walled, and one such place would contain ten or twenty thousand people of the same clan and surname, who were frequently at war with the people living in the next town. To be kindly received in one place was not uncommonly a source of danger in the next. In circumstances such as these the preserving care of our GOD was often manifested.

After a time the local mandarin became ill, and the native doctors were unable to relieve him. He had heard from some who had been under my treatment of the benefit derived, and was led to seek our help. GOD blessed the medicines given, and grateful for relief, he advised our renting a house for a hospital and dispensary. Having his permission, we were able to secure the entire premises, one room of which we had previously occupied. I had left my stock of medicine and surgical instruments under the care of my friend, the late Mr. Wylie, in Shanghai, and went back at once to fetch them.

Mr. Burns came down from a town called Am-po, that we had visited together several times, to see me off, and returned again when I had sailed, with two native evangelists sent up from Hong-Kong by the Rev. J. Johnson, of the American Baptist Missionary Union. The people were willing to listen to their preaching, and to accept their books as a gift, but they would not buy them. One night robbers broke in and carried off everything they had, with the exception of their stock of literature, which was supposed to be valueless. Next morning, very early, they were knocked up by persons wishing to buy books, and the sales continued; so that by breakfast time they had not only cash enough to procure food, but to pay also for the pas-

sage of one of the men to Double Island, below Swatow, with a letter to Mr. Burns's agent to supply him with money. Purchasers continued coming during that day and the next, and our friends lacked nothing; but on the third day they could not sell a single book. Then, however, when the cash from their sales was just exhausted, the messenger returned with supplies.

It was early in July, after about four months' residence in Swatow, that I left for Shanghai, intending to return in the course of a few weeks, bringing with me my medical apparatus, for further work in association with the Rev. William Burns. A new and promising field seemed to be opening before us, and it was with much hopeful anticipation that we looked forward to the future of the work. Marked blessing was indeed in store for the city and neighbourhood of Swatow; but it was not the purpose of GOD that either of us should remain to reap the harvest. Mr. Burns while in the interior was taken up and imprisoned by the Chinese authorities soon after I left, and was sent to Canton. And though he returned to Swatow after the war had broken out, he was called away for other service, which prevented his subsequent return; while my journey to Shanghai proved to be the first step in a diverging pathway leading to other spheres.