

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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CHAPTER XIII

MAN PROPOSES, GOD DISPOSES

IT is interesting to notice the various events which united, in the providence of GOD, in preventing my return to Swatow, and ultimately led to my settling in Ningpo, and making that the centre for the development of future labours.

Upon reaching Shanghai, great was my dismay to find that the premises in which my medicines and instruments had been stored were burnt down, and that all the medicines and many of the instruments were entirely destroyed. To me this appeared a great calamity, and I fear I was more disposed with faithless Jacob to say, "All these things are against me," than to recognise that "All things work together for good." I had not then learned to think of GOD as the One Great Circumstance "in Whom we live, and move, and have our being"; and of all lesser, external circumstances, as necessarily the kindest, wisest, best, because either ordered or permitted by Him. Hence my disappointment and trial were very great.

Medicines were expensive in Shanghai, and my means were limited. I therefore set out on an inland journey to Ningpo, hoping to obtain a supply from Dr. William Parker, a member of the same mission as myself. I took with me my few remaining possessions, the principal being my watch, a few surgical instruments, a concertina, books for the study of Chinese, which in those days were very expensive; but left behind in Shanghai a portion of my money.

The country through which I had to pass was suffering much from drought; it was the height of summer; and the water in the Grand Canal was very low, having been largely drawn upon for the neighbouring rice fields, as well as evaporated by the intense heat. I had determined to make the journey as much of a mission tour as possible, and set out well supplied with Christian tracts and books. After fourteen days spent in travelling slowly through the populous country, preaching and distributing books, etc., we reached a large town called Shih-mun-wan, and here, finding that my supply of literature was exhausted, I determined not to linger over the rest of the journey, but to reach Ningpo as speedily as possible, via the city of Haining.

August 4th, 1856.

There was no water beyond Shih-mun-wan, so I paid off my boat, hired coolies to carry my things as far as to Chang-gan, and ere sunrise we were on the way. I walked on alone, leaving my servant to follow with the men, who made frequent stoppages to rest; and on reaching a city through which we had to pass, I waited for them in a tea-shop just outside the North Gate.

The coolies came on very slowly, and seemed tired when they arrived. I soon found that they were both opium-smokers, so that, although they had only carried a load that one strong man would think nothing of taking three times the distance, they really seemed wearied.

After some rice and tea and an hour's rest—including, I doubt not, a smoke of the opium pipe—they were a little refreshed, and I proposed moving on, that we might get to Chang-gan before the sun became too powerful. My servant, however, had a friend in the city, and he desired to spend the day there, and to go on next morning. But to this I objected, wishing to reach Hai-ning that night if possible. . . . We therefore set off, entered the North Gate, and had passed through about a third of the city, when the coolies stopped to rest, and said they should be unable to carry the burden on to Chang-gan. Finally, they agreed to take it to the South Gate, where they were to be paid in proportion to the distance they had carried it; and the servant undertook to call other coolies and come along with them.

I walked on before as in the first instance, and the distance being only about four miles, soon reached Chang-gan, and waited their arrival, meanwhile engaging coolies for the rest of the journey to Hai-ning. Having waited a long time, I began to wonder at the delay; and at length it became too late to finish the journey to Hai-ning that night. I felt somewhat annoyed; but, that my feet were blistered and the afternoon very hot, I should have gone back to meet them and urge them on. At last I concluded that my servant must have gone to his friend's, and would not appear until evening. But evening came, and still there was no sign of them.

Feeling very uneasy, I began diligently to inquire whether they had been seen. At last a man responded, "Are you a guest from Shih-mun-wan?" I answered in the affirmative. "Are you going to Hai-ning?" "That is my destination." "Then your things have gone on before you; for I was sitting in a tea-shop when a coolie came in, took a cup of tea, and set off for Hai-ning in a great hurry, saying that the bamboo box and bed he carried, which were just such as you describe yours to have been, were from Shih-mun-wan, and he had to take them to Hai-ning tonight, where he was to be paid at the rate of ten cash a pound." From this I concluded that my goods were on before me; but it was impossible to follow them at once, for I was too tired to walk, and it was already dark.

Under these circumstances all I could do was to seek a lodging for the night; and no easy task I found it. After raising my heart to GOD to ask His aid, I walked through to the farther end of the town, where I thought the tidings of a foreigner's being in the place might not have spread, and looked out for an inn. I soon came to one, and went in, hoping that I might pass unquestioned, as it was already dark. Asking the bill of fare, I was told that

cold rice—which proved to be more than “rather burnt”—and snakes, fried in lamp-oil, were all that could be had. Not wishing any question to be raised as to my nationality, I was compelled to order some, and tried to make a meal, but with little success.

While thus engaged I said to the landlord, “I suppose I can arrange to spend the night here?”

To which he replied in the affirmative; but bringing out his book, he added—

“In these unsettled times we are required by the authorities to keep a record of our lodgers: may I ask your respected family name?”

“My unworthy family name is Tai,” I responded. “And your honourable second name?”

“My humble name is Ia-koh” (James).

“What an extraordinary name! I never heard it before. How do you write it?”

I told him, and added, “It is a common name in the district from which I come.”

“And may I ask whence you come and whither you are going?”

“I am journeying from Shanghai to Ningpo, by way of Hang-chau.”

“What may be your honourable profession?”

“I heal the sick.”

“Oh! you are a physician,” the landlord remarked; and to my intense relief closed the book. His wife, however, took up the conversation.

“You are a physician, are you?” said she; “I am glad of that, for I have a daughter afflicted with leprosy. If you will cure her, you shall have your supper and bed for nothing.”

I was curious enough to inquire what my supper and bed were to cost, if paid for; and to my amusement found they were worth less than three-halfpence of our money !

Being unable to benefit the girl, I declined to prescribe for her, saying that leprosy was a very intractable disease, and that I had no medicines with me.

The mother, however, brought pen and paper, urging, “You can at least write a prescription, which will do no harm, if it does no good.”

But this also I declined to do, and requested to be shown my bed. I was conducted to a very miserable room on the ground-floor, where, on some boards raised upon two stools, I passed the night, without bed or pillow, save my umbrella and shoe, and without any mosquito netting. Ten or eleven other lodgers were sleeping in the same room, so I could not take anything off, for fear of its being stolen; but I was, I found, by no means too warm as midnight came on.

August 5th.

As may be supposed, I arose but little rested or refreshed, and felt very far from well. I had to wait a long time ere breakfast was obtainable, and then there was another delay before I could get change for the only dollar I had with me, in consequence of its being chipped in one or two places. More than three hundred cash also were deducted from its price on this account, which was a serious loss to me in my trying position.

I then sought throughout the town for tidings of my servant and coolies, as I thought it possible that they might have arrived later, or have come on in the morning. The town is large, long, and straggling, being nearly two miles from one end to the other, so this occupied some time. I gained no information, however; and, footsore and weary, set out for Hai-ning in the full heat of the day. The journey—about eight miles—took me a long time; but a halfway village afforded a resting-place and a cup of tea, both of which I gladly availed myself of. When about to leave again, a heavy shower of rain came on, and the delay thus occasioned enabled me to speak a little to the people about the truths of the Gospel.

The afternoon was far spent before I approached the northern suburb of Hai-ning, where I commenced inquiries, but could hear no tidings of my servant or things. I was told that outside the East Gate I should be more likely to hear of them, as it was there the sea-junks called. I therefore proceeded thither, and sought for them outside the Little East Gate, but in vain. Very weary, I sat down in a tea-shop to rest; and while there a number of persons from one of the mandarin's offices came in, and made inquiries as to who I was, where I had come from, etc. On learning the object of my search, one of the men in the tea-shop said, "A bamboo box and a bed, such as you describe, were carried past here about half an hour ago. The bearer seemed to be going towards either the Great East Gate or the South Gate; you had better go to the hong's there and inquire." I asked him to accompany me in the search, and promised to reward him for his trouble, but he would not. Another man offered to go with me, so we set off together, and both inside and outside the two gates made diligent inquiries, but all in vain. I then engaged a man to make a thorough search, promising him a liberal reward if he should be successful. In the meantime I had some dinner, and addressed a large concourse of people who had gathered together.

When he returned, having met with no success, I said to him, "I am now quite exhausted: will you help me to find quarters for the night, and then I will pay you for your trouble?" He was willing to befriend me, and we set off in search of lodgings. At the first place or two the people would not receive me; for though on our first going in they seemed willing to do so, the presence of a man who followed us, and who, I found, was engaged in one

of the Government offices, seemed to alarm them, and I was refused. We now went to a third place, and being no longer followed by the mandarin's messenger, we were promised quarters; some tea was brought, and I paid the man who had accompanied me for his trouble.

Soon after he was gone some official people came in; they soon went away, but the result of their visit was that I was told I could not be entertained there that night. A young man present blamed them for their heartless behaviour, and said, "Never mind, come with me; and if we cannot get better lodgings for you, you shall sleep at our house." I went with him, but we found the people of his house unwilling to receive me. Weary and footsore, so that I could scarcely stand, I had again to seek quarters, and at length got promise of them; but a little crowd collecting about the door, they desired me to go to a tea-shop and wait there till the people had retired, or they would be unable to accommodate me. There was no help for it, so I went, accompanied still by the young man, and waited till past midnight. Then we left for the promised resting-place; but my conductor would not find it, and he led me about to another part of the city; and finally, between one and two o'clock, he left me to pass the rest of the night as best I could.

I was opposite a temple, but it was closed; so I lay down on the stone steps in front of it, and putting my money under my head for a pillow, should soon have been asleep in spite of the cold had I not perceived a person coming stealthily towards me. As he approached I saw he was one of the beggars so common in China, and had no doubt his intention was to rob me of my money. I did not stir, but watched his movements, and looked to my FATHER not to leave me in this hour of trial. The man came up, looked at me for some time to assure himself that I was asleep (it was so dark that he could not see my eyes fixed on him), and then began to feel about me gently. I said to him in the quietest tone, but so as to convince him that I was not, nor had been, sleeping, "What do you want?" He made no answer, but went away.

I was very thankful to see him go, and when he was out of sight put as much of my cash as would not go into my pocket safely up my sleeve, and made my pillow of a stone projection of the wall. It was not long ere I began to doze, but I was aroused by the all but noiseless footsteps of two persons approaching; for my nervous system was rendered so sensitive by exhaustion that the slightest noise startled me. Again I sought protection from Him who alone was my stay, and lay still as before, till one of them came up and began to feel under my head for the cash. I spoke again, and they sat down at my feet. I asked them what they were doing; they replied that they, like me, were going to pass the night there. I then requested them to take the opposite side, as there was plenty of room, and leave this side to me; but they

would not move from my feet, so I raised myself up and set my back against the wall.

They said, "You had better lie down and sleep; if you do not, you will be unable to walk tomorrow. Do not be afraid; we shall not leave you, and will see that no one hurts you."

"Listen to me," I replied. "I do not want your protection; I need it not; I am not a Chinese; I do not worship your senseless, helpless idols. I worship GOD; He is my FATHER; I trust in Him. I know well what you are, and what your intentions are, and shall keep my eye on you, and shall not sleep."

On this, one of them went away, but soon returned with a third companion. I felt very uneasy, but looked to GOD for help. Once or twice one of them got up to see if I was asleep. I only said, "Do not be mistaken; I am not sleeping." Occasionally my head dropped, and this was a signal for one of them to rise; but I at once roused myself and made some remark. As the night slowly passed on, I felt very weary; and to keep myself awake, as well as to cheer my mind, I sang several hymns, repeated aloud some portions of Scripture, and engaged in prayer in English, to the great annoyance of my companions, who seemed as if they would have given anything to get me to desist. After that they troubled me no more; and shortly before dawn of day they left me, and I got a little sleep.

August 6th.

I was awakened by the young man who had so misled me on the previous evening. He was very rude, and insisted on my getting up and paying him for his trouble, and even went so far as to try to accomplish by force what he wanted. This roused me; and in an unguarded moment, with very improper feeling, I seized his arm with such a grasp as he little expected I was capable of, and dared him to lay a finger upon me again or to annoy me further. This quite changed his manner; he let me quietly remain till the guns announced the opening of the gates of the city, and then he begged me to give him some money to buy opium with. It is needless to say this was refused. I gave him the price of two candles, that he said he had burnt while with me last night, and no more. I learned he was connected with one of the mandarin's offices.

As soon as possible, I bought some rice gruel and tea for breakfast, and then once more made a personal search after my things. Some hours thus spent proving unavailing, I set out on the return journey, and after a long, weary, and painful walk reached Chang-gan about noon. Here also my inquiries failed to give me any trace of the missing goods; so I had a meal cooked in a tea-shop, got a thorough wash and bathed my inflamed feet, and after dinner rested and slept till four in the afternoon.

Much refreshed, I then set off to return to the city, at the South Gate of which I had parted with my servant and coolies two days before. On the way I was led to reflect on the goodness of GOD, and recollected that I had not made it a matter of prayer that I might be provided with lodgings last night. I felt condemned, too, that I should have been so anxious for my few things, while the many precious souls around me had caused so little emotion. I came as a sinner and pleaded the blood of JESUS, realising that I was accepted in Him—pardoned, cleansed, sanctified—and oh the love of JESUS, how great I felt it to be! I knew something more than I had ever previously known of what it was to be despised and rejected, and to have nowhere to lay one's head; and I felt more than ever I had done before the greatness of that love which induced Him to leave His home in glory and suffer thus for me; nay, to lay down His very life upon the Cross. I thought of Him as "despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"; I thought of Him at Jacob's well, weary, hungry, and thirsty, yet finding it His meat and drink to do His Father's will; and contrasted this with my littleness of love. I looked to Him for pardon for the past, and for grace and strength to do His will in the future, to tread more closely in His footsteps, and be more than ever wholly His. I prayed for myself, for friends in England, and for my brethren in the work. Sweet tears of mingled joy and sorrow flowed freely, the road was almost forgotten, and before I was aware of it I had reached my destination. Outside the South Gate I took a cup of tea, asked about my lost luggage, and spoke of the love of JESUS. Then I entered the city, and after many vain inquiries left it by the North Gate.

I felt so much refreshed both in mind and body by the communion I had on my walk to the city that I thought myself able to finish the remaining six miles back to Shih-mun-wan that evening. First I went into another tea-shop to buy some native cakes, and was making a meal of them when who should come in but one of the identical coolies; who had carried my things the first stage. From him I learned that after I left them they had taken my luggage to the South Gate; there my servant went away, saying on his return that I had gone on, that he did not intend to start at once, but would spend the day with his friend, and then rejoin me; they carried the things to this friend's house, and left them there. I got him to go with me to the house, and there learned that the man had spent the day and night with them, and next morning had called other coolies, and set off for Hang-chau. This was all I could gather; so, unable to do anything but proceed on my return journey to Shanghai with all expedition, I left the city again. It was now too late to go on to Shih-mun-wan. I looked to my FATHER as able to supply all my need, and received another token of His ceaseless love and care, being invited to sleep on a hong-boat, now dry in the bed of the river. The night was again

very cold and the mosquitoes troublesome. Still, I got a little rest, and at sunrise was up and continued my journey.

August 7th.

I felt very ill at first, and had a sore throat, but reflected on the wonderful goodness of GOD in enabling me to bear the heat by day and the cold by night so long. I felt also that quite a load was now taken off my mind. I had committed myself and my affairs to the LORD, and knew that if it was for my good and for His glory my things would be restored; if not, all would be for the best. I hoped that the most trying part of my journey was now drawing to a close, and this helped me, weary and footsore, on the way. When I got to Shih-mun-wan and had break-fasted, I found I had still eight hundred and ten cash in hand; and I knew that the hong-boat fare to Kia-hing Fu was one hundred and twenty cash, and thence to Shanghai three hundred and sixty, leaving me just three hundred and thirty cash-or twelve pence and a fraction—for three or four days' provisions. I went at once to the boat office, but to my dismay found that from the dry state of the river, goods had not come down, so that no boat would leave today and perhaps none tomorrow. I inquired if there were no letter-boats for Kia-hing Fu, and was told that they had already left. The only remaining resource was to ascertain if any private boats were going in which I could get a passage. My search, however, was in vain; and I could get no boat to undertake to go all the way to Shanghai, or my difficulty would have been at an end.

Just at this juncture I saw before me, at a turn in the canal, a letter-boat going in the direction of Kia-hing Fu. This, I concluded, must be one of the Kia-hing boats that had been unexpectedly detained, and I set off after it as fast as hope and the necessities of the case would carry me. For the time being weariness and sore feet were alike forgotten. After a chase of about a mile I overtook it.

“Are you going to Kia-hing Fu?” I called out.

“No,” was the only answer.

“Are you going in that direction?”

“No.”

“Will you give me a passage as far as you do go that way?”

Still “No,” and nothing more.

Completely dispirited and exhausted, I sank down on the grass and fainted away.

As consciousness returned some voices reached my ear, and I found they were talking about me. One said, “He speaks pure Shanghai dialect,” and from their own speech I knew them to be Shanghai people. Raising myself, I saw that they were on a large hong-boat on the other side of the canal, and after a few words they sent their small boat to fetch me, and I went on board

the junk. They were very kind, and gave me some tea; and when I was refreshed and able to partake of it, some food also. I then took my shoes and stockings off to ease my feet, and the boatman kindly provided me with hot water to bathe them. When they heard my story, and saw the blisters on my feet, they evidently pitied me, and hailed every boat that passed to see if it was going my way. Not finding one, by and by, after a few hours' sleep, I went ashore with the captain, intending to preach in the temple of Kwan-ti.

Before leaving the junk I told the captain and those on board that I was now unable to help myself; that I had not strength to walk to Kia-hing Fu, and having been disappointed in getting a passage today, I should no longer have sufficient means to take me there by letter-boat, which was an expensive mode of travelling; that I knew not how the GOD whom I served would help me, but that I had no doubt He would do so; and that my business now was to serve Him where I was. I also told them that the help which I knew would come ought to be an evidence to them of the truth of the religion which I and the other missionaries at Shanghai preached.

On our way to the town, while engaged in conversation with the captain, we saw a letter-boat coming up. The captain drew my attention to it; but I reminded him that I had no longer the means of paying my passage by it. He hailed it, nevertheless, and found that it was going to a place about nine English miles from Shanghai, whence one of the boatmen would carry the mails overland to the city. He then said, "This gentleman is a foreigner from Shanghai, who has been robbed, and has no longer the means of returning. If you will take him with you as far as you go, and then engage a sedan chair to carry him the rest of the way, he will pay you in Shanghai. You see my boat is lying aground yonder for want of water, and cannot get away. Now, I will stand surety; and if this gentleman does not pay when you get to Shanghai, I will do so on your return." This unsolicited kindness on the part of a Chinaman, a perfect stranger, will appear the more remarkable to any one acquainted with the character of the Chinese, who are generally most reluctant to risk their money. Those on the letter-boat agreeing to the terms, I was taken on board as a passenger. Oh, how thankful I felt for this providential interposition, and to be once more on my way to Shanghai!

Letter-boats such as the one on which I was now travelling are of a long narrow build, and very limited as to their inside accommodation. One has to lie down all the time they are in motion, as a slight movement would easily upset them. This was no irksome condition to me, however; on the contrary, I was only too glad to be quiet. They are the quickest boats I have seen in China. Each one is worked by two men, who relieve one another continuously night and day. They row with their feet, and paddle with their hands;

or if the wind is quite favourable, row with their feet, and with one hand manage a small sail, while steering with the other.

After a pleasant and speedy journey, I reached Shanghai in safety on August 9th, through the help of Him who has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."