

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 XIV

PROVIDENTIAL GUIDANCE

IT now seemed very clear that the lost property—including everything I possessed in China, with the exception of a small sum of money providentially left in Shanghai—had been deliberately stolen by my servant, who had gone off with it to Hang-chau. The first question, of course, was how best to act for the good of the man who had been the cause of so much trouble. It would not have been difficult to take steps that would have led to his punishment; though the likelihood of any reparation being made for the loss sustained was very small. But the consideration which weighed most heavily was that the thief was a man for whose salvation I had laboured and prayed; and I felt that to prosecute him would not be to emphasise the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, in which we had read together, “Resist not evil,” and other similar precepts. Finally, concluding that his soul was of more value than the £40 worth of things I had lost, I wrote and told him this, urging upon him his need of repentance and faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST. The course I took commended itself to my Christian friends in England, one of whom was afterwards led to send me a cheque for £40—the first of many subsequently received from the same kind helper.

Having obtained the little money left in Shanghai, I again set out for Ningpo, to seek assistance from Dr. Parker in replacing the medicines I had previously lost by fire. This being satisfactorily accomplished, I returned once more to Shanghai, *en route* for Swatow, hoping soon to rejoin my much-loved friend, Mr. Burns, in the work in that important centre. GOD had willed it otherwise, however; and the delay caused by the robbery was just sufficient to prevent me from starting for the South as I had intended.

Over the political horizon storm-clouds had long been gathering, precursors of coming war; and early in October of this year (1856) the affair of the *Lorcha Arrow* at Canton led to the definite commencement of hostilities. Very soon China was deeply involved in a second prolonged struggle with foreign powers; and missionary operations, in the South at any rate, had to be largely suspended. Tidings of these events, together with letters from Mr. Burns, arrived just in time to meet me in Shanghai as I was leaving for Swatow; and thus hindered, I could not but realise the hand of GOD in closing the door I had so much desired to enter.

While in Ningpo, I had made the acquaintance of Mr. John Jones, who, with Dr. Parker, represented the Chinese Evangelisation Society in that city. Hindered from returning to Swatow, I now decided to join these brethren in the Ningpo work, and set out at once upon the journey. On the afternoon of

the second day, when already about thirty miles distant from Shanghai, Mr. Jones and I drew near the large and important city of Sung-kiang, and I spoke of going ashore to preach the Gospel to the thronging multitudes that lined the banks and crowded the approaches to the city gates.

Among the passengers on board the boat was one intelligent man, who in the course of his travels had been a good deal abroad, and had even visited England, where he went by the name of Peter. As might be expected, he had heard something of the Gospel, but had never experienced its saving power. On the previous evening I had drawn him into earnest converse about his soul's salvation. The man listened with attention, and was even moved to tears, but still no definite result was apparent. I was pleased, therefore, when he asked to be allowed to accompany me, and to hear me preach.

I went into the cabin of the boat to prepare tracts and books for distribution on landing with my Chinese friend, when suddenly I was startled by a splash and a cry from without. I sprang on deck, and took in the situation at a glance. Peter was gone! The other men were all there, on board, looking helplessly at the spot where he had disappeared, but making no effort to save him. A strong wind was carrying the junk rapidly forward in spite of a steady current in the opposite direction, and the low-lying, shrubless shore afforded no landmark to indicate how far we had left the drowning man behind.

I instantly let down the sail and leapt overboard in the hope of finding him. Unsuccessful, I looked around in agonising suspense, and saw close to me a fishing-boat with a peculiar drag-net furnished with hooks, which I knew would bring him up.

"Come!" I cried, as hope revived in my heart, "Come and drag over this spot directly; a man is drowning just here!"

"Veh bin" (It is not convenient), was the unfeeling answer.

"Don't talk of convenience!" cried I in an agony; "a man is drowning, I tell you!"

"We are busy fishing," they responded, "and cannot come."

"Never mind your fishing," I said, "I will give you more money than many a day's fishing will bring; only come—come at once!"

"How much money will you give us?"

"We cannot stay to discuss that now! Come, or it will be too late. I will give you five dollars" (then worth about thirty shillings in English money).

"We won't do it for that," replied the men. "Give us twenty dollars, and we will drag."

"I do not possess so much: do come quickly, and I will give you all I have!"

"How much may that be?"

“ I don’t know exactly, about fourteen dollars.”

At last, but even then slowly enough, the boat was paddled over, and the net let down. Less than a minute sufficed to bring up the body of the missing man. The fishermen were clamorous and indignant because their exorbitant demand was delayed while efforts at resuscitation were being made. But all was in vain—life was extinct.

To myself this incident was profoundly sad and full of significance, suggesting a far more mournful reality. Were not those fishermen actually guilty of this poor Chinaman’s death, in that they had the means of saving him at hand, if they would but have used them? Assuredly they were guilty. And yet, let us pause ere we pronounce judgment against them, lest a greater than Nathan answer, “Thou art the man.” Is it so hard-hearted, so wicked a thing to neglect to save the body? Of how much sorer punishment, then, is he worthy who leaves the soul to perish, and Cain-like says, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The LORD JESUS commands, commands me, commands you, my brother, and you, my sister. “Go,” says He, “go ye into *all* the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” Shall we say to Him, “No, it is not convenient”? shall we tell Nina that we are busy fishing and cannot go? that we have bought a piece of ground and cannot go? that we have purchased five yoke of oxen, or have married, or are engaged in other and more interesting pursuits, and cannot go? Ere long “we must all appear before the judgment seat of CHRIST; that every one may receive the things done in his body.” Let us remember, let us pray for, let us labour for the unevangelised Chinese; or we shall sin against our own souls. Let us consider Who it is that has said, “If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? and He that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not He render to every man according to his works?”

Through midnight gloom from Macedon,
The cry of myriads as of one;
The voiceful silence of despair
Is eloquent in awful prayer:
The soul’s exceeding bitter cry,
“Come o’er and help us, or we die.”

How mournfully it echoes on,
For half the earth is Macedon;
These brethren to their brethren call,
And by the Love which loves them all,
And by the whole world’s Life they cry,
“O ye that live, behold we die !”

By other sounds the world is won
Than that which wails from Macedon
The roar of gain is round it rolled,
Or men unto themselves are sold,
And cannot list the alien cry,
“O hear and help us, lest we die !”

Yet with that cry from Macedon
The very car of CHRIST rolls on:
*“I come; who would abide My day,
In yonder wilds Srefiare My way;
My voice is crying in their cry,
Help ye the dying, lest ye die.”*

JESU, for men of Man the SON,
Yea, THINE the cry from Macedon;
Oh, by the kingdom and the power
And glory of Thine advent hour,
Wake heart and will to hear their cry;
Help us to help them, lest we die.