

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 XVI

TIMELY SUPPLIES

NOT infrequently our GOD brings His people into difficulties on purpose that they may come to know Him as they could not otherwise do. Then He reveals Himself as “a very present help in trouble,” and makes the heart glad indeed at each fresh revelation of a FATHER’S faithfulness. We who only see so small a part of the sweet issues of trial often feel that we would not for anything have missed them; how much more shall we bless and magnify His Name when all the hidden things are brought to light!

In the autumn of 1857, just one year after I came to settle in Ningpo, a little incident occurred that did much to strengthen our faith in the loving-kindness and ever watchful care of GOD.

A brother in the LORD, the Rev. John Quarterman, of the American Presbyterian Mission North, was taken with virulent small-pox, and it was my mournful privilege to nurse him through his suffering illness to its fatal close. When all was over, it became necessary to lay aside the garments worn while nursing, for fear of conveying the infection to others. Not having sufficient money in hand to purchase what was needful in order to make this change, prayer was the only resource. The LORD answered it by the unexpected arrival of a long-lost box of clothing from Swatow, that had remained in the care of the Rev. William Burns when I left him for Shanghai, in the early summer of the previous year. The arrival of the things just at this juncture was as appropriate as it was remarkable, and brought a sweet sense of the FATHER’S own providing.

About two months later the following was penned:—

November 18th, 1857.

Many seem to think that I am very poor. This certainly is true enough in one sense, but I thank GOD it is “as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.” And my GOD shall supply all my need; to Him be all the glory. I would not, if I could, be otherwise than I am—entirely dependent myself upon the LORD, and used as a channel of help to others.

On Saturday, the 4th inst., our regular home mail arrived. That morning we supplied, as usual, a breakfast to the destitute poor, who came to the number of seventy. Sometimes they do not reach forty, at others again exceeding eighty. They come to us every day, LORD’S Day excepted, for then we cannot manage to attend to them and get through all our other duties too. Well, on that Saturday morning we paid all expenses, and provided ourselves for the morrow, after which we had not a single dollar

left between us. How the LORD was going to provide for Monday we knew not; but over our mantel-piece hung two scrolls in the Chinese character-Ebenezer, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us"; and Jehovah-Jireh, "The LORD will provide"—and He kept us from doubting for a moment. That very day the mail came in, a week sooner than was expected, and Mr. Jones received a bill for two hundred and fourteen dollars. We thanked GOD and took courage. The bill was taken to a merchant, and although there is usually a delay of several days in getting the change, this time he said, "Send down on Monday." We sent, and though he had not been able to buy all the dollars, he let us have seventy on account; so all was well.

Oh, it is sweet to live thus directly dependent upon the LORD, who never fails us! On Monday the poor had their breakfast as usual, for we had not told them not to come, being assured that it was the LORD'S work, and that the LORD would provide. We could not help our eyes filling with tears of gratitude when we saw not only our own needs supplied, but the widow and the orphan, the blind and the lame, the friendless and the destitute, together provided for by the bounty of Him who feeds the ravens. "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His Name together. . . . Taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. O fear the LORD, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing"—and if not good, why want it?

But even two hundred dollars cannot last for ever, and by New Year's Day supplies were again getting low. At last, on January 6th, 1858, only one solitary cash remained -the twentieth part of a penny-in the joint possession of Mr. Jones and myself; but though tried we looked to GOD once again to manifest His gracious care. Enough provision was found in the house to supply a meagre breakfast; after which, having neither food for the rest of the day, nor money to buy any, we could only betake ourselves to Him who was able to supply all our need with the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread."

After prayer and deliberation we thought that perhaps we ought to dispose of something we possessed in order to meet our immediate requirements. But on looking round we saw nothing that we could well spare, and little that the Chinese would purchase for ready money. Credit to any extent we might have had, could we conscientiously have availed ourselves of it, but this we felt to be unscriptural in itself, as well as inconsistent with the position we were in. We had, indeed, one article—an iron stove—which we knew the Chinese would readily purchase; but we much regretted the necessity of parting with it. At length, however, we set out to the founder's, and after a walk of some distance came to the river,

which we had intended to cross by a floating bridge of boats; but here the LORD shut up our path. The bridge had been carried away during the preceding night, and the river was only passable by means of a ferry, the fare for which was two cash each person. As we only possessed one cash, our course clearly was to return and await GOD'S own interposition on our behalf.

Upon reaching home, we found that Mrs Jones had gone with the children to dine at a friend's house, in accordance with an invitation accepted some days previously. Mr. Jones, though himself included in the invitation, refused now to go and leave me to fast alone. So we set to work and carefully searched the cupboards; and though there was nothing to eat, we found a small packet of cocoa, which, with a little hot water, somewhat revived us. After this we again cried to the LORD in our trouble, and the LORD heard and saved us out of all our distresses. For while we were still upon our knees a letter arrived from England containing a remittance.

This timely supply not only met the immediate and urgent need of the day; for in the assured confidence that GOD, whose we were and whom we served, would not put to shame those whose whole and only trust was in Himself, my marriage had been previously arranged to take place just fourteen days after this date. And this expectation was not disappointed; for "the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed." And although during subsequent years our faith was often exercised, and sometimes severely, He ever proved faithful to His promise, and never suffered us to lack any good thing.

Never, perhaps, was there a union that more fully realised the blessed truth, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD." My dear wife was not only a precious gift to me; GOD blessed her to many others during the twelve eventful years through which she was spared to those that loved her and to China.

Hers had been a life connection with missionary work in that great empire; for her father, the loved and devoted Samuel Dyer, was amongst the very earliest representatives of the London Mission in the East. He reached the Straits as early as 1827, and for sixteen years laboured assiduously amongst the Chinese in Penang and Singapore, completing at the same time a valuable fount of Chinese metallic type, the first of the kind that had then been attempted. Dying in 1843, it was never Mr. Dyer's privilege to realise his hopes of ultimately being able to settle on Chinese soil; but his children lived to see the country opened to the Gospel, and to take their share in the great work that had been so dear to his heart. At the time of her marriage, my dear wife had been already living for several years in Ningpo with her

friend, Miss Aldersey, in whose varied missionary operations she was well qualified to render valuable assistance.