

# A RETROSPECT

BY

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

THIRD EDITION

TORONTO

CHINA INLAND MISSION

## CHAPTER XVII

### GOD A REFUGE FOR US

**A** SOMEWHAT different though not less manifest answer to prayer was vouchsafed early in the year 1859. My dear wife was brought very low by illness, and at last all hope of recovery seemed gone. Every remedy tried had proved unavailing; and Dr. Parker, who was in attendance, had nothing more to suggest. Life was ebbing fast away. The only ground of hope was that GOD might yet see fit to raise her up, in answer to believing but submissive prayer.

The afternoon for the usual prayer meeting among the missionaries had arrived, and I sent in a request for prayer, which was most warmly responded to. Just at this time a remedy that had not yet been tried was suggested to my mind, and I felt that I must hasten to consult Dr. Parker as to the propriety of using it. It was a moment of anguish. The hollow temples, sunken eyes, and pinched features denoted the near approach of death; and it seemed more than questionable as to whether life would hold out until my return. It was nearly two miles to Dr. Parker's house, and every moment appeared long. On my way thither, while wrestling mightily with GOD in prayer, the precious words were brought with power to my soul, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." I was at once enabled to plead them in faith, and the result was deep, deep, unspeakable peace and joy. All consciousness of distance was gone. Dr. Parker cordially approved of the use of the means suggested, but upon arriving at home I saw at a glance that the desired change had taken place in the absence of this or any other remedy. The pinched aspect of the countenance had given place to the calmness of tranquil slumber, and not one unfavourable symptom remained to retard recovery to health and strength.

Spared thus in answer to prayer the loss of my own loved one, it was with added sympathy and sorrow that I felt for Dr. Parker, when, in the autumn of the same year, his own wife was very suddenly removed. It being necessary for the doctor to return at once with his mother-less children to Glasgow, temporary arrangements had to be made for the conduct of the Mission Hospital in Ningpo, for which he alone had been responsible. Under these circumstances he requested me to take up the work, at least so far as the dispensary was concerned. After a few days' waiting upon the LORD for guidance, I felt constrained to undertake not only the dispensary work, but also that of the hospital; relying solely upon the faithfulness of a prayer-hearing GOD to furnish the means required for its support.

The funds for the maintenance of the hospital had hitherto been supplied by the proceeds of the doctor's foreign medical practice; and with his departure these ceased. But had not GOD said that whatever we ask in the Name of the LORD JESUS shall be done? And are we not told to seek first the kingdom of GOD, not means to advance it, and that all these things shall be added to us? Such promises were surely sufficient. Eight days before entering upon this responsibility I had not the remotest idea of ever doing so; still less could friends at home have anticipated it. But the LORD had foreseen the need, and already funds were on the way to supply it.

At times there were not less than fifty in-patients in the hospital, besides a large number who daily attended the out-patient department. Thirty beds were ordinarily allotted to free patients and their attendants; and about as many to opium-smokers, who paid for their board while being cured of the habit. As all the wants of the sick in the wards were supplied gratuitously, in addition to the remedial appliances needed for the out-patient work, the daily expenses were considerable; besides which, a number of native attendants were required, involving their support.

When Dr. Parker handed the hospital over to me he was able to leave money that would meet the salaries and working expenses of the current month, and little more. Being unable to guarantee their support, his native staff retired; and then I mentioned the circumstances to the members of our little church, some of whom volunteered to help me, depending, like myself, upon the LORD; and they with me continued to wait upon GOD that in some way or other He would provide for His own work. Day by day the stores diminished, and they were all but exhausted when one day a remarkable letter reached me from a friend in England which contained a cheque for £50. The letter stated that the sender had recently lost his father, and had inherited his property; that not desiring to increase his personal expenditure, he wished to hold the money which had now been left to him to further the LORD'S work. He enclosed the £50, saying that I might know of some special need for it; but leaving me free to use it for my own support, or in any way that the LORD might lead me; only asking to know how it was applied, and whether there was need for more.

After a little season of thanksgiving with my dear wife, I called my native helpers into our little chapel, and translated to them the letter. I need not say how rejoiced they were, and that we together praised GOD. They returned to their work in the hospital with overflowing hearts, and told out to the patients what a GOD was ours; appealing to them whether their idols had ever helped them so. Both helpers and patients were blessed spiritually through this remarkable provision, and from that time the LORD provided all that was necessary for carrying on the institution, in addition to what was

needed for the maintenance of my own family, and for sustaining other branches of missionary work under my care. When, nine months later, I was obliged through failure of health to relinquish this charge, I was able to leave more funds in hand for the support of the hospital than were forthcoming at the time I undertook it.

But not only were pecuniary supplies vouchsafed in answer to prayer—many lives were spared; persons apparently in hopeless stages of disease were restored, and success was given in cases of serious and dangerous operations. In the case of one poor man, whose legs were amputated under very unfavourable circumstances, healthy action took place with such rapidity that both wounds were healed in less than two weeks. And more permanent benefits than these were conferred. Many were convinced of the truth of Christianity; not a few sought the LORD in faith and prayer, and experienced the power of the Great Physician to cure the sin-sick soul. During the nine months above alluded to sixteen patients from the hospital were baptized, and more than thirty others became candidates for admission into one or other of the Christian churches in the city.

Thus the year 1860 began with openings on all hands, but time and strength were sadly too limited to admit of their being used to the best advantage. For some time the help of additional workers had been a much-felt need; and in January very definite prayer was made to the LORD of the harvest that He would thrust forth more labourers into this special portion of the great world-field. Writing to relatives at home in England, under date of January 16th, 1860, I thus expressed the deep longing of our hearts:—

Do you know any earnest, devoted young men desirous of serving GOD in China, who—not wishing for more than their actual support—would be willing to come out and labour here? Oh, for four or five such helpers! They would probably begin to preach in Chinese in six months time; and in answer to prayer the necessary means for their support would be found.

But no one came to help us then; and under the incessant physical and mental strain involved in the care of the hospital during Dr. Parker's absence, as well as the continued discharge of my other missionary duties, my own health began rapidly to fail, and it became a serious question as to whether it would not be needful to return to England for a time.

It was hard to face this possibility. The growing church and work seemed to need our presence, and it was no small trial to part from those whom we had learned so truly to love in the LORD. Thirty or forty native Christians had been gathered into the recently organised church; and the well-filled meetings, and the warm-hearted earnestness of the converts, all bespoke a future of much promise. At last, however, completely prostrated by repeated attacks of illness, the only hope of restoration seemed to lie in a voyage to

England and a brief stay in its more bracing climate; and this necessity, painful though it seemed at the time, proved to be only another opportunity for the manifestation of the faithfulness and loving care of Him “who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.”

As heretofore, the LORD was present with His aid. The means for our journey were supplied, and that so liberally that we were able to bring with us a native Christian to assist in translation or other literary work, and to instruct in the language such helpers as the LORD might raise up for the extension of the Mission. That He would give us fellow-labourers we had no doubt; for we had been enabled to seek them from Him in earnest and believing prayer for many months previously.

The day before leaving China we wrote as follows to our friend W. T. Berger, Esq., whom we had known in England, and who had ever strengthened our hands in the LORD while in that distant land:—

“We are bringing with us a young Chinese brother to assist in literary work, and I hope also in teaching the dialect to those whom the LORD may induce to return with us.”

And throughout the voyage our earnest cry to GOD was that He would overrule our stay at home for good to China, and make it instrumental in raising up at least five helpers to labour in the province of CHEH-KIANG.

The way in which it pleased the LORD to answer these earnest and believing prayers, and the “exceeding abundantly” with which He crowned them, we shall now sketch in brief outline.