

A RETROSPECT

BY

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

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CHINA INLAND MISSION

CHAPTER II

THE CALL TO SERVICE

THE first joys of conversion passed away after a time, and were succeeded by a period of painful deadness of soul, with much conflict. But this also came to an end, leaving a deepened sense of personal weakness and dependence on the Lord as the only KEEPER as well as SAVIOUR of His people. How sweet to the soul, wearied and disappointed in its struggles with sin, is the calm repose of trust in the SHEPHERD of Israel.

Not many months after my conversion, having a leisure afternoon, I retired to my own chamber to spend it largely in communion with GOD. Well do I remember that occasion. How in the gladness of my heart I poured out my soul before GOD; and again and again confessing my grateful love to Him who had done everything for me—who had saved me when I had given up all hope and even desire for salvation—I besought Him to give me some work to do for Him, as an outlet for love and gratitude; some self-denying service, no matter what it might be, however trying or however trivial; something with which He would be pleased, and that I might do for Him who had done so much for me. Well do I remember, as in unreserved consecration I put myself, my life, my friends, my all, upon the altar, the deep solemnity that came over my soul with the assurance that my offering was accepted. The presence of GOD became unutterably real and blessed; and though but a child under sixteen, I remember stretching myself on the ground, and lying there silent before Him with unspeakable awe and unspeakable joy.

For what service I was accepted I knew not; but a deep consciousness that I was no longer my own took possession of me, which has never since been effaced. It has been a very practical consciousness. Two or three years later propositions of an unusually favourable nature were made to me with regard to medical study, on the condition of my becoming apprenticed to the medical man who was my friend and teacher. But I felt I dared not accept any binding engagement such as was suggested. I was not my own to give myself away; for I knew not when or how He whose alone I was, and for whose disposal I felt I must ever keep myself free, might call for service.

Within a few months of this time of consecration the impression was wrought into my soul that it was in China the LORD wanted me. It seemed to me highly probable that the work to which I was thus called might cost my life; for China was not then open as it is now. But few missionary societies had at that time workers in China, and but few books on the subject of Chi-

na missions were accessible to me. I learned, however, that the Congregational minister of my native town possessed a copy of Medhurst's *China*, and I called upon him to ask a loan of the book. This he kindly granted, asking me why I wished to read it. I told him that God had called me to spend my life in missionary service in that land. "And how do you propose to go there?" he inquired. I answered that I did not at all know; that it seemed to me probable that I should need to do as the Twelve and the Seventy had done in Judea—go without purse or scrip, relying on Him who had called me to supply all my need. Kindly placing his hand upon my shoulder, the minister replied, "Ah, my boy, as you grow older you will get wiser than that. Such an idea would do very well in the days when CHRIST Himself was on earth, but not now."

I have grown older since then, but not wiser. I am more than ever convinced that if we were to take the directions of our MASTER and the assurances He gave to His first disciples more fully as our guide, we should find them to be just as suited to our times as to those in which they were originally given.

Medhurst's book on China emphasised the value of medical missions there, and this directed my attention to medical studies as a valuable mode of preparation.

My beloved parents neither discouraged nor encouraged my desire to engage in missionary work. They advised me, with such convictions, to use all the means in my power to develop the resources of body, mind, heart, and soul, and to wait prayerfully upon GOD, quite willing, should He show me that I was mistaken, to follow His guidance, or to go forward if in due time He should open the way to missionary service. The importance of this advice I have often since had occasion to prove. I began to take more exercise in the open air to strengthen my physique. My feather bed I had taken away, and sought to dispense with as many other home comforts as I could, in order to prepare myself for rougher lines of life. I began also to do what Christian work was in my power, in the way of tract distribution, Sunday-school teaching, and visiting the poor and sick, as opportunity afforded.

After a time of preparatory study at home, I went to Hull for medical and surgical training. There I became assistant to a doctor who was connected with the Hull school of medicine, and was surgeon also to a number of factories, which brought many accident cases to our dispensary, and gave me the opportunity of seeing and practising the minor operations of surgery.

And here an event took place that I must not omit to mention. Before leaving home my attention was drawn to the subject of setting apart the first fruits of all one's increase and a proportionate part of one's possessions to the LORD'S service. I thought it well to study the question with my Bible in

hand before I went away from home, and was placed in circumstances which might bias my conclusions by the pressure of surrounding wants and cares. I was thus led to the determination to set apart not less than one-tenth of whatever moneys I might earn or become possessed of for the LORD'S service. The salary I received as medical assistant in Hull at the time now referred to would have allowed me with ease to do this. But owing to changes in the family of my kind friend and employer, it was necessary for me to reside out of doors. Comfortable quarters were secured with a relative, and in addition to the sum determined on as remuneration for my services I received the exact amount I had to pay for board and lodging.

Now arose in my mind the question, Ought not this sum also to be tithed? It was surely a part of my income, and I felt that if it had been a question of Government income tax it certainly would not have been excluded. On the other hand, to take a tithe from the whole would not leave me sufficient for other purposes; and for some little time I was much embarrassed to know what to do. After much thought and prayer I was led to leave the comfortable quarters and happy circle in which I was now residing, and to engage a little lodging in the suburbs—a sitting-room and bedroom in one—undertaking to board myself. In this way I was able without difficulty to tithe the whole of my income; and while I felt the change a good deal, it was attended with no small blessing.

More time was given in my solitude to the study of the Word of God, to visiting the poor, and to evangelistic work on summer evenings than would otherwise have been the case. Brought into contact in this way with many who were in distress, I soon saw the privilege of still further economising, and found it not difficult to give away much more than the proportion of my income I had at first intended.

About this time a friend drew my attention to the question of the personal and pre-millennial coming of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and gave me a list of passages bearing upon it, without note or comment, advising me to ponder the subject. For a while I gave much time to studying the Scriptures about it, with the result that I was led to see that this same Jesus who left our earth in His resurrection body was so to come again, that His feet were to stand on the Mount of Olives, and that He was to take possession of the temporal throne of His father David which was promised before His birth. I saw, further, that all through the New Testament the coming of the LORD was the great hope of His people, and was always appealed to as the strongest motive for consecration and service, and as the greatest comfort in trial and affliction. I learned, too, that the period of His return for His people was not revealed, and that it was their privilege, from day to day and from hour to hour, to live as men who wait for the LORD; that thus living it was immateri-

al, so to speak, whether He should or should not come at any particular hour, the important thing being to be so ready for Him as to be able, whenever He might appear, to give an account of one's stewardship with joy, and not with grief.

The effect of this blessed hope was a thoroughly practical one. It led me to look carefully through my little library to see if there were any books there that were not needed or likely to be of further service, and to examine my small wardrobe, to be quite sure that it contained nothing that I should be sorry to give an account of should the MASTER come at once. The result was that the library was considerably diminished, to the benefit of some poor neighbours, and to the far greater benefit of my own soul, and that I found I had articles of clothing also which might be put to better advantage in other directions.

It has been very helpful to me from time to time through life, as occasion has served, to act again in a similar way; and I have never gone through my house, from basement to attic, with this object in view, without receiving a great accession of spiritual joy and blessing. I believe we are all in danger of accumulating—it may be from thoughtlessness, or from pressure of occupation—things which would be useful to others, while not needed by ourselves, and the retention of which entails loss of blessing. If the whole resources of the Church of GOD were well utilised, how much more might be accomplished! How many poor might be fed and naked clothed, and to how many of those as yet unreached the Gospel might be carried! Let me advise this line of things as a constant habit of mind, and a profitable course to be practically adopted whenever circumstances permit.