

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 VIII

VOYAGE TO CHINA

SOON after this the time so long looked forward to arrived—the time that I was to leave England for China. After being set apart with many prayers for the ministry of GOD’S Word among the heathen Chinese I left London for Liverpool; and on the 19th of September 1853 a little service was held in the stern cabin of the *Dumfries*, which had been secured for me by the Committee of the Chinese Evangelisation Society, under whose auspices I was going to China.

My beloved, now sainted, mother had come to see me off from Liverpool. Never shall I forget that day, nor how she went with me into the little cabin that was to be my home for nearly six long months. With a mother’s loving hand she smoothed the little bed. She sat by my side, and joined me in the last hymn that we should sing together before the long parting. We knelt down, and she prayed—the last mother’s prayer I was to hear before starting for China. Then notice was given that we must separate, and we had to say good-bye, never expecting to meet on earth again.

For my sake she restrained her feelings as much as possible. We parted; and she went on shore, giving me her blessing; I stood alone on deck, and she followed the ship as we moved towards the dock gates. As we passed through the gates, and the separation really commenced, I shall never forget the cry of anguish wrung from that mother’s heart. It went through me like a knife. I never knew so fully, until then, what “GOD *so* loved the world” meant. And I am quite sure that my precious mother learned more of the love of GOD to the perishing in that hour than in all her life before.

Oh, how it must grieve the heart of GOD when He sees His children indifferent to the needs of that wide world for which His beloved, His only begotten SON died!

Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear;
Forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house;
So shall the KING desire thy beauty:
For He is thy LORD; and worship thou Him.

Praise GOD, the number is increasing who are finding out the exceeding joys, the wondrous revelations of His mercies, vouchsafed to those who “follow Him,” and emptying themselves, leave all in obedience to His great commission.

It was on 19th September 1853 that the *Dumfries* sailed for China; and not until 1st March, in the spring of the following year, did I arrive in Shanghai.

Our voyage had a rough beginning, but many had promised to remember us in constant prayer. No small comfort was this; for we had scarcely left the Mersey when a violent equinoctial gale caught us, and for twelve days we were beating backwards and forwards in the Irish Channel, unable to get out to sea. The gale steadily increased, and after almost a week we lay to for a time; but drifting on a lee coast, we were compelled again to make sail, and endeavoured to beat off to windward. The utmost efforts of the captain and crew, however, were unavailing; and Sunday night, 25th September, found us drifting into Carnarvon Bay, each tack becoming shorter, until at last we were within a stone's-throw of the rocks. About this time, as the ship, which had refused to stay, was put round in the other direction, the Christian captain said to me, "We cannot live half an hour now: what of your call to labour for the LORD in China?" I had previously passed through a time of much conflict, but that was over, and it was a great joy to feel and to tell him that I would not for any consideration be in any other position; that I strongly expected to reach China; but that, if otherwise, at any rate the Master would say it was well that I was found seeking to obey His command.

Within a few minutes after wearing ship the captain walked up to the compass, and said to me, "The wind has freed two points; we shall be able to beat out of the bay." And so we did. The bowsprit was sprung and the vessel seriously strained; but in a few days we got out to sea, and the necessary repairs were so thoroughly effected on board that our journey to China was in due time satisfactorily accomplished.

One thing was a great trouble to me that night. I was a very young believer, and had not sufficient faith in GOD to see Him in and through the use of means. I had felt it a duty to comply with the earnest wish of my beloved and honoured mother, and for her sake to procure a swimming-belt. But in my own soul I felt as if I could not simply trust in GOD while I had this swimming-belt; and my heart had no rest until on that night, after all hope of being saved was gone, I had given it away. Then I had perfect peace; and, strange to say, put several light things together, likely to float at the time we struck, without any thought of inconsistency or scruple. Ever since, I have seen clearly the mistake I made—a mistake that is very common in these days, when erroneous teaching on faith-healing does much harm, misleading some as to the purposes of GOD, shaking the faith of others, and distressing the minds of many. The use of means ought not to lessen our faith in GOD; and our faith in GOD ought not to hinder our using

whatever means He has given us for the accomplishment of His own purposes.

For years after this I always took a swimming-belt with me, and never had any trouble about it; for after the storm was over, the question was settled for me, through the prayerful study of the Scriptures. GOD gave me then to see my mistake, probably to deliver me from a great deal of trouble on similar questions now so constantly raised. When in medical or surgical charge of any case, I have never thought of neglecting to ask GOD'S guidance and blessing in the use of appropriate means, nor yet of omitting to give Him thanks for answered prayer and restored health. But to me it would appear as presumptuous and wrong to neglect the use of those measures which He Himself has put within our reach, as to neglect to take daily food, and suppose that life and health might be maintained by prayer alone.

The voyage was a very tedious one. We lost a good deal of time on the equator from calms; and when we finally reached the Eastern Archipelago, were again detained from the same cause. Usually a breeze would spring up soon after sunset, and last until about dawn. The utmost use was made of it, but during the day we lay still with flapping sails, often drifting back and losing a good deal of the advantage we had gained during the night.

This happened notably on one occasion, when we were in dangerous proximity to the north of New Guinea. Saturday night had brought us to a point some thirty miles off the land; but during the Sunday morning service, which was held on deck, I could not fail to notice that the captain looked troubled, and frequently went over to the side of the ship. When the service was ended, I learnt from him the cause—a four-knot current was carrying us rapidly towards some sunken reefs, and we were already so near that it seemed improbable that we should get through the afternoon in safety. After dinner the long-boat was put out, and all hands endeavoured, without success, to turn the ship's head from the shore. As we drifted nearer we could plainly see the natives rushing about the sands and lighting fires every here and there. The captain's horn-book informed him that these people were cannibals, so that our position was not a little alarming.

After standing together on the deck for some time in silence, the captain said to me, "Well, we have done everything that can be done; we can only await the result." A thought occurred to me, and I replied, "No, there is one thing we have not done yet." "What is it?" he queried. "Four of us on board are Christians," I answered (the Swedish carpenter and our coloured steward, with the captain and myself); "let us each retire to his own cabin, and in agreed prayer ask the LORD to give us immediately a breeze. He can as easily send it now as at sunset."

The captain complied with this proposal. I went and spoke to the other two men, and after prayer with the carpenter we all four retired to wait upon GOD. I had a good but very brief season in prayer, and then felt so satisfied that our request was granted that I could not continue asking, and very soon went up again on deck. The first officer, a godless man, was in charge. I went over and asked him to let down the clews or corners of the mainsail, which had been drawn up in order to lessen the useless flapping of the sail against the rigging. He answered, "What would be the good of that?" I told him we had been asking wind from GOD, that it was coming immediately, and we were so near the reef by this time that there was not a minute to lose. With a look of incredulity and contempt, he said with an oath that he would rather see a wind than hear of it! But while he was speaking I watched his eye, and followed it up to the royal (the topmost sail), and there, sure enough, the corner of the sail was beginning to tremble in the coming breeze. "Don't you see the wind is coming? Look at the royal!" I exclaimed. "No, it is only a cat's-paw," he rejoined (a mere puff of wind). "Cat's-paw or not," I cried, "pray let down the mainsail, and let us have the benefit!"

This he was not slow to do. In another minute the heavy tread of the men on the deck brought up the captain from his cabin to see what was the matter; and he saw that the breeze had indeed come. In a few minutes we were ploughing our way at six or seven knots an hour through the water, and the multitude of naked savages whom we had seen on the beach had no wreckage that night. We were soon out of danger; and though the wind was sometimes unsteady, we did not altogether lose it until after passing the Pelew Islands.

Thus GOD encouraged me, ere landing on China's shores, to bring every variety of need to Him in prayer, and to expect that He would honour the Name of the LORD JESUS, and give the help which each emergency required.