

A RETROSPECT

BY

J. HUDSON TAYLOR, M.R.C.S., F.R.G.S.

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

THIRD EDITION

TORONTO

CHINA INLAND MISSION

CHAPTER IX

EARLY MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES

ON landing in Shanghai on 1st March 1854, I found myself surrounded with difficulties that were wholly unexpected. A band of rebels, known as the “Red Turbans,” had taken possession of the native city, against which was encamped an Imperial army of from forty to fifty thousand men, who were a much greater source of discomfort and danger to the little European community than were the rebels themselves. Upon landing, I was told that to live outside the Settlement was impossible, while within the foreign concession apartments were scarcely obtainable at any price. The dollar, now worth about three shillings, had risen to a value of eight-and-ninepence, and the prospect for one with only a small income of English money was dark indeed. However, I had three letters of introduction, and counted on counsel and help, especially from one of those to whom I had been commended, whose friends I well knew and highly valued. Of course I sought him out at once, but only to learn that he had been buried a month or two before, having died from fever during the time of my voyage.

Saddened by these tidings, I inquired for a missionary to whom another of my letters of introduction was addressed; but a further disappointment awaited me—he had left for America. The third letter remained; but as it had been given by a comparative stranger, I had expected less from it than from the other two. It proved, however, to be GOD’S channel of help. The Rev. Dr. Medhurst, of the London Mission, to whom it was addressed, introduced me to Dr. Lockhart, who kindly allowed me to live with him for six months. Dr. Medhurst procured my first Chinese teacher; and he, Dr. Edkins, and the late Mr. Alexander Wylie gave me considerable help with the language.

Those were indeed troublous times, and times of danger. Coming out of the city one day with Mr. Wylie, he entered into conversation with two coolies, while we waited a little while at the East Gate for a companion who was behind us. Before our companion came up an attack upon the city from the batteries on the opposite side of the river commenced, which caused us to hurry away to a place of less danger, the whiz of the balls being unpleasantly near. The coolies, unfortunately, stayed too long, and were wounded. On reaching the Settlement we stopped a few minutes to make a purchase, and then proceeded at once to the London Mission compound, where, at the door of the hospital, we found the two poor coolies with whom Mr. Wylie had conversed, their four ankles terribly shattered by a cannon ball. The

poor fellows declined amputation, and both died. We felt how narrow had been our escape.

At another time, early in the morning, I had joined one of the missionaries on his verandah to watch the battle proceeding, at a distance of perhaps three-quarters of a mile, when suddenly a spent ball passed between us and buried itself in the verandah wall. Another day my friend Mr. Wylie left a book on the table after luncheon, and returning for it about five minutes later, found the arm of the chair on which he had been sitting shot clean away. But in the midst of these and many other dangers GOD protected us.

After six months' stay with Dr. Lockhart, I rented a native house outside the Settlement, and commenced a little missionary work amongst my Chinese neighbours, which for a few months continued practicable. When the French joined the Imperialists in attacking the city, the position of my house became so dangerous that during the last few weeks, in consequence of nightly recurring skirmishes, I gave up attempting to sleep except in the daytime. One night a fire appeared very near, and I climbed up to a little observatory I had arranged on the roof of the house, to see whether it was necessary to attempt escape. While there a ball struck the ridge of the roof on the opposite side of the quadrangle, showering pieces of broken tile all around me, while the ball itself rolled down into the court below. It weighed four or five pounds; and had it come a few inches higher, would probably have spent its force on me instead of on the building. My dear mother kept the ball for many years. Shortly after this I had to abandon the house and return to the Foreign Settlement—a step that was taken none too soon, for before the last of my belongings were removed, the house was burnt to the ground.

Of the trials of this early period it is scarcely possible to convey any adequate idea. To one of a sensitive nature, the horrors, atrocities, and misery connected with war were a terrible ordeal. The embarrassment also of the times was considerable. With an income of only eighty pounds a year, I was compelled, upon moving into the Settlement, to give one hundred and twenty for rent, and sublet half the house; and though the Committee of the Chinese Evangelisation Society increased my income when, after the arrival of Dr. Parker, they learned more of our circumstances, many painful experiences had necessarily been passed through. Few can realise how distressing to so young and untried a worker these difficulties seemed, or the intense loneliness of the position of a pioneer who could not even hint at many of his circumstances, as to do so would have been a tacit appeal for help.

The great enemy is always ready with his oft-repeated suggestion, "All these things are against me." But oh, how false the word! The cold, and even the hunger, the watchings and sleeplessness of nights of danger, and

the feeling at times of utter isolation and helplessness, were well and wisely chosen, and tenderly and lovingly meted out. What circumstances could have rendered the Word of GOD more sweet, the presence of GOD more real, the help of GOD more precious? They were times, indeed, of emptying and humbling, but were experiences that made not ashamed, and that strengthened purpose to go forward as GOD might direct, with His proved promise, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." One can see, even now, that "as for GOD, His way is perfect," and yet can rejoice that the missionary path of today is comparatively a smooth and an easy one.

Journeying inland was contrary to treaty arrangements, and attended with much difficulty, especially for some time after the battle of Muddy Flat, in which an Anglo-American contingent of about three hundred marines and seamen, with a volunteer corps of less than a hundred residents, attacked the Imperial camp, and drove away from thirty to fifty thousand Chinese soldiers, the range of our shot and shell making the native artillery useless. Still, in the autumn of 1854 a journey of perhaps a week's duration was safely accomplished with Dr. Edkins, who of course did the speaking and preaching, while I was able to help in the distribution of books.