

"BY FAITH"

Henry W. Frost and
the China Inland Mission

by Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor

By THE CHINA INLAND MISSION, PHILADELPHIA

Chapter Twenty-Two -

INNS AND LONELINESS ON THE KAN

SIX months after the women of the North American party had entered upon their work in Kiangsi, most of the men who had come out with Mr. Taylor were on their way to the same field.

They had been longer at the Language School than usual, as there were no senior workers on the Kan River and no occupied centers to receive them. Pioneering work of the stiffest kind lay before them, and they were happy in having as their escort from Anking, Mr. F. A. Steven with his bride (nee Florence Tapscott), shortly to be connected with the North American branch, as we have seen. Both were pioneers. They knew well the kind of experience that lay before their companions, and very helpful were the times of prayer and fellowship they had together.

Ten days in junks on the flooded Yangtze - a perilous journey - brought them to Takutang, beautifully situated near the northern boundary of Kiangsi. From the Mission House high on the hill, they looked out over the Poyang Lake toward the valleys and distant highlands of the Kan River - a territory comprising three great prefectures that were to form their parish.

Seven to eight million people occupied that southern part of the province, enclosed by mountain ranges on the east and west and south. Seven to eight millions-spiritually in darkness and "the shadow of death," a prey to sin, superstition, and endless fears, with no witness to the saving-faith that is in CHRIST alone!

In face of needs so great, so overwhelming, that missionary band was indeed as nothing.

Five loaves to feed five thousand! Only a year in China, they had little of the language and still less experience to guide them. This, in one way, was an asset, for they did not know enough to hold them back. Their hearts were warm with faith and love. The Master's command was clear. They were there in simple obedience, sure that He could not fail.

Sixty miles up the Kan River, the party divided, James Lawson and J. S. Rough going ashore at the busy city of Changshu, to herald the Glad Tidings throughout the prefecture of Linkiang. There Mr. Steven and the rest changed into long, flat-bottomed boats, able to negotiate the shallows and formidable rapids that lay ahead.

Eighty miles farther south (several days' journey), William Horne and John Meikle were left at Kian, governing city of the important prefecture of the same name. There the River, half a mile

wide, still offered an open highway, south, and ever southward.

For nearly a hundred and forty miles, George Duff and Mr. Steven traveled on, preaching and leaving tracts by the way, till they came to Kancheo, the prefecture that reaches to the extreme south of the province.

Almost two million people traded in its markets, lived in its cities, and cultivated its beautiful valleys: a strong and turbulent people they proved, but among them, from the first, were those whose hearts the Lord opened.

Happily for themselves, the young evangelists had come unannounced. No one was expecting them; so they were not troubled by official attention, and were able to carry out their plan of action unhindered. This was to travel widely, visiting as many cities and markets as possible, simply to scatter the good seed in the form of Scripture portions and tracts and make known the chief elements of the Gospel. After a couple of months of such work, they were to return to Takutang, where Mrs. Steven was waiting, for further conference and prayer and for a period of language study.

Needless to say, this program was not carried out without plenty to test courage and endurance. Far apart in their appointed fields, the young men had a great variety of experiences; but one thing they all had to meet was the intense, overpowering curiosity of the crowds that assembled wherever they were seen.

In spite of Chinese dress and queue, they were immediately recognized as foreigners, and so far in the interior this caused no little excitement. Another experience in common was the discomfort of life in ordinary inns. Too often dark, damp, and dirty, they were always alive with small but voracious foes, and afforded little if any privacy. If a room had a door, in place of a scanty curtain, that was encouraging. If the door could be fastened, it was still more so. But even a barred door may not deter the very curious - as George Duff discovered when a man came tumbling in, through a space over the top of the door, so determined was he to see the "foreign devil."

His perplexity was amusing on that occasion when, after looking under the bed and in every corner, he could not find the object of his search. In vain the missionary assured him that the room had no other occupant. That dark-eyed, dark-haired young man was too like themselves to be a real "foreign devil"! But if he was disappointed in one way, he found more than he had expected in another. For he carried away some knowledge of the Glad Tidings.

Unfortunately, as it proved, another of the young evangelists did not have dark hair and eyes, and his sandy type of coloring brought him much undesired attention. At one place, where he and his companion were spending Sunday, he had actually to sit outside the inn from nine in the morning till five o'clock at night, just to be stared at, listening to shouts of "Red-haired Foreign Devil" from the changing crowd, not to speak of other uncomplimentary remarks. The people were so noisy that he could not make himself heard; but they bought books freely, and he comforted himself with the thought that his fellow-worker was having a quieter time inside.

On the whole, the crowds were friendly, however, and many interesting conversations were held in the inns at night. The eagerness with which books were purchased was an encouraging feature

of those first journeys, though it gave rise to some trying situations. In the busy market of Tongning, Horne and Meikle were so rushed that they had to back up against a wall to save themselves from being trampled under foot by the crowd.

"We could not hand out books quickly enough to suit them (wrote the latter). And what a scene the market presented when the rush was over! One old man was in a sad plight, gathering up the rice cakes he had been boiling in oil - his stove upset and his oil scattered - while others who had been able to save their wares were spreading them out again on various stalls. Our stock of books was completely sold out."

But at the near-by city of Tongsin, a young barber was met who seemed really to accept the truth. An old man also listened with the deepest interest, and said, with tears in his eyes, "When will you, Teachers, come again to tell us more of this good Message of Salvation?"

Thankful and encouraged, though weary after six weeks and more of tramping and preaching, the young men reassembled at Takutang to compare notes and give themselves to prayer and study. Winter over, they set out in good heart to return to the south of the province, little expecting the changed conditions which awaited them. For, by that time, the authorities were alive to their movements, and had determined to hinder and thwart them in every way possible. Their passports entitled the young missionaries to travel freely, but did not provide for residence or the purchase of property. Not that they wished to settle down. Their prayer at that time was not for opened cities but for open hearts. And that prayer was graciously answered, in spite of all opposing forces.

"In February we set out again for the south (wrote Mr. Rough), expecting to go ahead with our work in peace and quietness. False hopes, alas! Lawson and I landed one evening at Changshu in a great welcome of mud and rain. With difficulty we got to the inn. Half an hour after entering its fetid atmosphere a commotion arose. A messenger had arrived with an urgent invitation for us to visit the Mandarin at once. A second hurry-up messenger soon followed. So forth we went, encouraging each other with the promise to those brought before magistrates for CHRIST's sake . . .

"From then on, for a long time, officials troubled us incessantly. Our passports were constantly demanded. A *wenshu* was attached to us. * A soldier (save the mark!) accompanied us wherever we went. Innkeepers who harbored us were arrested and beaten, and every device was employed to keep us moving on.

* A *Wenshu*, or Government dispatch, may prove a troublesome document, though it is nominally a request for protection, passed on from one official to another.

"Riots and beatings were not unknown in those days," Lawson added, from painful experience, but it was all for the Lord's sake.

At Kanchow, on their arrival, Horne and Meikle almost despaired of finding accommodation. Every inn, it appeared, was full. The boatman who had brought them was pressing to be set free. And, after hours of searching, there seemed no place on shore that would receive them. They could only look up for help, in earnest, united prayer. And then, as night was closing in, their servant returned, saying he had found a place. It was the meanest kind of an inn, on a back street,

but they were made welcome.

"The innkeeper and his wife gave us their own room (Meikle wrote), the best they had, poor things! Just beside it was the hogpen, with six big, fat pigs. The noise and smell can be imagined! Still, we were thankful for shelter under the circumstances.

"When do you leave and where are you going?" was the question that met them next morning from aggressive yamen runners. And while they were out, preaching and bookselling, these underlings cruelly beat the landlord who had dared to shelter them, right on the public street."

"Move on! Move on!" was now the urge that followed the missionaries in all three prefectures. "But this moving on," as they thankfully proved, "gave us the opportunity of witnessing in hundreds of small towns and villages, in which, otherwise, the story of JESUS and His great redeeming love might never have been heard."

Hard as their life became on those long tramps and in easily excited cities, they were not without evidence of a growing interest in their message. In Kanchow, Horne and Meikle made many friends. They were even able to rent small premises to which inquirers came night after night for meetings.

"This was too much for the enemy, who stirred up the *literati* against us, so that we were obliged to leave the city. Several of the inquirers escorted us to the boat with real sorrow, and supplied us with provisions. We left, commending them to GOD and to the Word of His grace, thankful for the testimony we had been able to bear in the city."

"Three months later (Mr. Horne continued), I went back to Kanchow, putting up in an inn outside the East Gate. There the inquirers gathered round me again, bringing others with them. They themselves rented two rooms in a private house, which they pressed me to occupy. I had no sooner done so than the landlord who had sheltered me was severely beaten, and I only saved the owner of the house by offering to be beaten for her. The official, fortunately, "would not presume," and I got him to promise not to touch her after I had left."

For they had to go away - making another long itineration - but this time one of the inquirers carried on the work in a little store they had rented, doing business as a doctor or herbalist. There the Christians gathered for meetings, and a quiet witness was maintained that attracted other inquirers. Brightest of these was the incense-maker, old Mr. Tseng, who always seemed to have some new experience of the Lord's goodness.

His business had brought him in a profit of two hundred dollars annually, for he was the sole maker of a spiral coil of incense much used in the city, which would keep on burning for forty-eight hours. Of his own accord, he gave it all up, when he came to know the Saviour. He would not even sell the utensils he had made, of which there were no duplicates, but smashed them up for firewood. His idolatrous books, a well-thumbed pile, he brought to the Christian drug store to be burned.

His missionary friends, when they heard of it, felt some concern as to how the old man would make a living. But he was full of joy. His faith was unquestioning, and the Lord honored it. Many were the stories he had to tell of answered prayer in his new undertaking - buying and

selling pigs - in which he was remarkably prospered.

Alone at Kian, for Mr. Steven had been called down to the coast, George Duff had like encouragement. He was able to stay on in the inn on the high bank of the river, and with a few simple remedies did a good deal of doctoring. This of course made friends, and gave opportunity for many a conversation on spiritual things. On several journeys, also, he found interested inquirers, before he had to leave on account of serious illness.

It was throughout the Linkiang prefecture that opposition proved most persistent. Again and again, James Lawson and his companion came back from long itinerations to find the old antagonism at Changshu, on the part of the authorities. Places they rented once or twice had to be given up, and there was nothing for it but to go on scattering the Good Seed far and wide, leaving it to the Lord to give the increase.

On one lonely journey Lawson found interested listeners at the city of Yianchow, with its seventy-thousand inhabitants, far up a tributary river, toward Hunan. He even entered that most antiforeign of all the provinces, and found an attentive hearing in several cities, bringing back, however, scars due to severe handling, "as a memento of my visit to Hunan."

All this meant a fight against discouragement, as time went on, for it was six years before Lawson's brave and patient itinerations resulted in the establishment of settled work. Two thousand Christians in that Yianchow district and more than twenty congregations meeting for regular worship were yet to rejoice his heart, but in those first few years there were times when he was almost giving up. Indeed, but for the dear Scottish couple at Takutang, as Mrs. Lawson tells us, the story could never have been what it is today.

Mrs. Reid's loving mother-touch did for the young men of that pioneer band what nothing else could have done, while Mr. Reid's comprehensive, staunch grasp of the Word of GOD made him a rock of strength to his younger brethren.

"On one occasion, several years before we were married, my husband had been having repeated attacks of malarial fever, accompanied by repeated attacks of temptation. Physically down, the lonely life of wandering from inn to inn made him an easy prey to depression. He felt that his work was useless and he had better go home.

Accordingly, he left Changshu and started for the coast. But he could not go without first seeing his friends at Takutang. Arrived there, Mr. and Mrs. Reid saw the situation and tactfully met his need. Mrs. Reid "mothered" him in real Scotch fashion - mended his socks, called him by his Christian name, and treated him as a son.

Mr. Reid soon took him to his study for a talk, and listened to his plans about going home, and the reasons that impelled him.

"But what does the Word say, Brother?" was, as my husband often told me, his way of meeting difficulties.

Needless to say now, a few days in that atmosphere brought the young missionary's heart and mind back to their true position; and with soul and body strengthened, he went back again to the

inns and the loneliness.

Those were days when Mr. Lawson carried most of his belongings in a small bundle with him. In summer he pawned his bedding - not needed in the heat - which, wrapped in waterproof cloth or paper, was well taken care of by the pawnbroker, to be redeemed when cold weather came again.

"Back to the inns and the loneliness" - but there was One who knew just what it all meant: One who will yet say, "**Ye did it unto me.**"

~ end of chapter 22 ~
