

Everlasting Pearl

One of China's Women

Anna Magdalena Johannsen



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EVERLASTING PEARL. The photo was taken after her marriage to Mr. Lü.

**[Frontispiece: EVERLASTING PEARL.
The photo was taken after her marriage to Mr. Lü.]**

EVERLASTING PEARL

ONE OF CHINA'S WOMEN

BY

ANNA MAGDALENA JOHANNSEN

FOR SIXTEEN YEARS A MISSIONARY IN CHINA

**WITH PREFACE BY
WALTER B. SLOAN**

SECOND IMPRESSION

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PREFACE

Thirty-five years ago missionary work was commenced in the city of Yüshan, situated on the Kwangsin River in Kiangsi, one of the central Provinces of China.

The conversion of "Everlasting Pearl," which is the subject of the following narrative, is a part of the harvest which has been reaped in later years by the missionaries of the China Inland Mission, who still continue to carry on the work in this city and neighbourhood.

In April of last year I had the privilege of spending ten days there, and of addressing the Church on the Sundays. On the first Monday morning we watched, with great interest, the departure of some of the country Christians to their homes. The party consisted of a simple-looking company of men and women, clad in the plain blue garments that the country people usually wear. The men were walking, but the few women, with their diminutive feet, were perched on barrows, and one of them was pointed out as being "evangelist, pastor, and Biblewoman, all rolled into one," in the district from which they all came. This was the woman, a part of whose life-story is told in this book, and after reading the many striking incidents which it contains, I gladly welcome the

opportunity afforded me of writing a brief introduction.

Even as a study of human life, the story is one that is full of interest. It takes us far away from the ordinary beaten track right into the heart of China; and so intimate is the writer's acquaintance with the habits and customs of the people, that there are few, even of those who know Chinese life well, who will not be able to learn something from reading these pages.

The Chinese are a people of strong character; and although this woman stands out as being possessed of marked ability and determination, there are other lives of which we catch a glimpse in which similar features can be clearly discerned.

It is, however, as an illustration of the power of the Gospel, in the heart of one who was brought up in heathenism, that the narrative possesses its supreme interest. In this case from the time when the great decision was made, after long resistance, to yield to Christ and trust in Him, there was no going back. We read of many trials, sorrows, testings, but the onward and upward course is steadily maintained.

The religious devotee, when converted, always makes a better disciple than the person who has been entirely indifferent to the concerns of the soul; and so it was in the case of "Everlasting Pearl." She clung strongly to the vow that she had taken when she became a vegetarian, and on this account she long withstood the claims of the Gospel; but when at last she heard the call of Christ, then she turned to Him in full surrender and whole-hearted obedience, and became a burning and a shining light amongst her relatives and neighbours.

The reader will observe the record of not a few dreams and visions in the story; but instead of these tending to discredit its truthfulness, they will only confirm it to those who know the life of the people of this class in China.

The statement is constantly being made that the Gospel spreads more through the life and testimony of the converts themselves than by the work of the missionaries. The way in which this woman was brought to Christ, and the way in which she led others to Him, illustrates this fact; but truth is many-sided, and here we also see how large a ministry there still is for the missionaries to exercise, and how much they are needed to help the people in the midst of their struggles, perplexities, and sorrows, by their counsel, kind sympathy, and their

prayers.

I have only to add that the account of the early years is given just as it has been told by the woman herself, and the account of the later days is a simple narrative of the facts as they have come under the observation of the writer.

WALTER B. SLOAN.

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A PRECIOUS BUNDLE

PLAITING SILK BRAID

A SOURCE OF GREAT DELIGHT

WRITING THE ENGAGEMENT DOCUMENT

ADORNED AS A BRIDE

THE OUT-STATION OF KUCHENG

ANOTHER JEWEL FOR CHRIST

EVERLASTING PEARL

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND INFANCY

It was a warm, close day in May, in Central China. The summer heat had just set in, and the inhabitants of Kucheng (Ancient City) were somewhat weary and languid, when a woman brought the news to her neighbour—"A daughter has been born to the Tu family." The news soon spread from door to door. All languor was shaken off, for curiosity got the better of lassitude, and the women, now fully alert, hobbled on their small feet to the little house where farmer Tu lived with his young wife and parents.

The house was a small, unpretentious building, with mud walls and a tiled roof. The interior was like that of all the homes around. If you had seen one, you had a good idea of the appearance of the rest. You entered the guest-hall, where on the wall at the farther end hung a large centre scroll, representing the "Ruler of Heaven," before which incense was lighted morning and evening. On either side of the idol, and on all the pillars you would see paper scrolls pasted up, with trite sayings written in flowery phrases, such as—

"If in your house you walk circumspectly, then when you leave your home you will associate with virtuous friends only."

"If the house is clean and beautiful, an excellent wind will be wafted through it."

"If the flowers give out their fragrance, a bright moon will shine upon them."

On either side of the guest-hall were doors leading into the bedrooms. Into one of these the women crowded eagerly, in search of the little newcomer, shouting, as they entered, their congratulations, first to the grandmother, and then to the parents of the child. On seeing the precious bundle held out to them, decked out in all the new, gorgeous, but uncomfortable clothes bought by the

maternal grandmother, one visitor could not help whispering, "What a pity it is not a boy!" But the other women politely interrupted her, and the young mother looked proudly at the "bundle of clothes" handed back to her. It was true she would have preferred a son, so would her husband, and above all her mother-in-law, but as it was their first child, even the little girl received a welcome. Had she been the second or third girl in the family, she would not have had the same kind reception. Very likely she would have been given away to some other family, who would have made her a drudge, and in later years have married her to one of their sons; or she might even have been left to die from want.

A precious bundle.

[Illustration: A precious bundle.]

But now things were different. Her parents were ready to lavish all their love and kindness on the little girl. They called in the fortune-teller, asking him what her fate would be in after years. He, having been told the day and hour of her birth, declared the child had been born under a lucky star. Her heart was good, her disposition kind and amiable; they need not worry about her, only, he added, she was born to toil and hard work. Satisfied with his prophecies, Mr. Tu paid him his wonted fee, fully believing in his skill.

After a month had elapsed, the relatives and neighbours were invited to a feast in honour of the child. Candles and incense were lighted before the gods, the babe was presented to them, and henceforward she was regarded as under their protection. When the little girl was a year old, the relatives assembled again. The grandmother had brought another lot of presents, among them some beautifully embroidered shoes, as the time had come for the child to learn to walk. She was old enough to notice things, and the baby eyes looked delightedly at her feet, that had never worn shoes before, now so beautifully adorned in the gayest of colours. Again a thank-offering was given to the gods. The grandmother carried the child forward, and this time the baby fingers had to hold the incense that was lighted before the sacred picture.

Thus, instead of being brought to the living, loving Saviour to be blessed, the little Chinese boy or girl is led before the dead idols, and dedicated to them. Do not say, "Oh, it will make no difference, the idols are nothing." The idols *are* nothing, but there is a fearful power of darkness behind them. The longer one lives in China, the more one feels that in a true sense the Chinese child is

dedicated, not to the idols only, but to the prince of darkness himself. And oh! how one longs to lead the parents into the light of Christ, so that they may bring their little ones to Him, who is waiting to bless them.

CHAPTER II

FOOTBINDING

The name given to the little girl was *Ch'ang-Chu*, which means "Everlasting Pearl," and a little treasure she proved herself to be to her parents. She was good-natured and kind-hearted, full of life and spirit, and gave much joy to those who watched over her. But it was very seldom—indeed, only on state occasions—that she was called Everlasting Pearl in her home and among her little friends. More often she went by the name of *Nü-ku*, or "Girl-dog." Her parents, afraid of losing her, had given her this name in order to deceive the evil spirits who might be seeking her life, but who were not likely to trouble themselves about a "dog."

One day, when Everlasting Pearl was about six years old, she saw her mother working on a pair of small shoes, and asked for whom they were. Her mother informed her they were for her, as it was time she had her feet bound. "Your feet are getting so big and clumsy," she said, "and you are running about far too much for a girl. It is high time that you had them bound." Everlasting Pearl made no protest. She knew all girls had to have their feet bound, and, of course, she could not be different from the rest.

So when the shoes were finished the footbinding was begun. But oh, the suffering of it! The mother took a long strip of calico, and wound it tightly round the little foot, bending the toes right under the sole. She did not succeed at once in getting the right size, so she undid the binding and tried again, whilst the little girl cried aloud for pain. Over and over again the process was begun, but not finished, as the shoes were so small that the feet could not be squeezed into them. But at last they were made to fit the shoes, and Everlasting Pearl walked about with sore and aching feet, wondering if they could ever become as small as those of some young girls she knew. Night after night she cried herself to sleep, wondering whether the pain would ever come to an end, and how she

could possibly endure it much longer. But there were compensations. Month by month and year by year her feet grew smaller, until her shoes were tinier than those she had worn in her babyhood. Her little girl-companions admired the tiny feet, and respected their owner, and both she and her mother received a great deal of praise from the older women. Her small feet were a sign that her mother cared for her, and meant to marry her well: so the future looked bright and promising.

CHAPTER III

CHILDHOOD DAYS

A few uneventful years passed by; happy ones for the little girl, as she was loved and appreciated by all. Two little brothers had been born in the home, and Everlasting Pearl might often be seen with the younger of them strapped to her back, rocking herself to and fro, and softly cooing to the babe. Or she might be found crouching before the cooking-stove, feeding the fire with brushwood, dried bracken, and fern, trying to use as little fuel as possible; for strict economy had to be practised in that home. At other times she would be sitting on a low stool beside her mother, spinning hemp, not with a spinning-wheel, but separating the threads with her fingers, and afterwards winding the thread into balls. Or she would be learning to sew, to embroider, and to make silk braid. By all these occupations she could only earn about a farthing a day; but that small sum would pay at least for her vegetables, salt, and oil, and even leave a little balance.

Plaiting silk braid.

[Illustration: Plaiting silk braid.]

During the summer and autumn she often had to take her low stool and work outside, so as to watch the grain, which was drying on a large bamboo mat in front of the house. On such occasions a long bamboo stick lay at her side, and this she used most vigorously, and with as much noise as possible, whenever the

inhabitants of the poultry-yard paid her a visit.

But her life was not all work. There were some variations. Her little brothers were a source of great delight to her. Her love for them was intense and motherly, though she would often tease them. When one of them happened to be dawdling over his food, she would do her best to coax him to eat, but often without success, until she playfully exclaimed:

Who first shall be satisfied may do as he wishes,
But the last one to finish must wash all the dishes.

A source of great delight.

[Illustration: A source of great delight.]

"Is there too great a burden on the shoulders of the Chinese Christians? Surely not. A little girl once was carrying a little boy on her back. Some one said, 'I see you have a big burden, haven't you?' 'No,' replied the little girl, 'that is not a burden; that is my brother.'"—Rev. Cheng Ching Yi, Edinburgh Missionary Conference.]

Her ready wit often helped to keep herself and others in good temper.

Not only was she full of life and humour, she was also kind and generous, and had sympathy with those who suffered. When, for instance, a poor, blind beggar came to her home, chanting his doleful refrain:

Oh, friends who can see, in heaven you dwell;
To have sightless eyes is like living in hell,

her heart would be touched, and she would beg and obtain permission from her mother to give him some rice.

Mrs. Tu was a home-loving and industrious woman, who did not often leave her home, or allow her children to run wild. Once a year, however, there was a big dramatic performance at Kucheng, and then Everlasting Pearl, dressed in her best, was taken to the theatre. These were red-letter days in her life. Chinese plays are mostly very stupid. Often immoral, and almost invariably connected

with idolatry, they are a snare to some of the people when they want to break with everything idolatrous. But to the little country girl the theatre was all that could be desired, and gave her much pleasure. She understood little of what she saw and heard there, but was carried away with the excitement and noise.

Another great occasion was that on which the famous god from Tanyoh passed through Kucheng. This deity was supposed to have his abode in Tanyoh, and called it his paternal home; but his maternal home was in Hongtsun, a few miles off, and to that village he paid yearly visits. He was carried with great pomp through Kucheng, and as he passed along all the people came to their doors to bow to him, and implore his blessing and protection. For the little girl this yearly visit of the idol was a very solemn occasion, as she was a firm believer in his power. As yet she had not heard of any greater power; she had never heard of the true and living God. The ugly idol she saw carried through the streets of Kucheng embodied the highest object for her worship, and to him she gave unreserved reverence.

Surely the messengers of Christ had been a long time in reaching Kucheng,—yet it was situated on one of the main roads in China. They had indeed been slow in obeying their Lord's command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

CHAPTER IV

ENGAGEMENT

Everlasting Pearl was now thirteen years old, and by many relatives and friends her parents were urged to make arrangements for her future. "You can keep her a few years before you marry her, but she certainly ought to be engaged," was the advice given generally.

A middleman, therefore, had to be found. There are always numerous applicants for that office, as not only is a good fee usually given, but it is considered an honour to be entrusted with the future arrangements for a young couple. On such occasions a great many untruths are often told, which are only

discovered after the marriage, when it is too late to mend matters. In Everlasting Pearl's case, the middleman was a relative, one of those who had been urging a speedy engagement.

He took the girl's *Pah tsï*,^[1] and went with these to a family of the name of Hsü, who lived in a village four miles distant. The Cyclical Characters were closely examined, and put in front of the ancestral tablet, incense being lighted before them morning and evening. There they remained for a month, and as nothing happened to disturb the peace of the family during the interval—no child was hurt, no pig died, no rice basin was broken—they were thought to augur only good luck, and to promise well for the alliance of the two families. So Mr. Hsü made out the "Cyclical Characters" of one of his sons, a young man twenty-five years old. He then called in an astrologer, and asked him to compare the two papers and give his verdict as to the advisability of the two young people being joined in marriage. With an important air, this gentleman examined the two papers put before him, and announced that everything was in favour of such an alliance. Several of their characters were alike, the two young people were both born under the "Tiger," and other things agreed as well. Whereupon the two families expressed their satisfaction, and declared themselves ready to arrange for an engagement.

But now the middleman had a busy time of it, for there were many things to settle before the engagement could take place. First of all, he went to Mr. and Mrs. Tu, and asked how much money they would want for their daughter. "As she is our only daughter, we want her to have a good outfit," replied the parents, "so Mr. Hsü must give at least \$40 and some good clothes." The list was then made out—\$40, ten articles of clothing, a ring, two bracelets, a pair of earrings, and three silver hair ornaments. The indefatigable middleman took the list to the Hsü family, who looked at it critically. After some time of haggling over the different articles, they finally agreed to furnish all, and preparations were begun in full earnest.

The day appointed for the engagement arrived, and there was great excitement in the two homes which were filled with visitors and well-wishers. The feast on both sides had to be provided by the young man's family. About dinner-time, on the day appointed, a party, headed by the middleman, was seen advancing toward Kucheng, carrying a sort of wooden box or basket, with several trays, one piled on top of the other. One tray carried all sorts of sweetmeats and the half of the money, twenty dollars, wrapped in red paper.

Another tray was filled with pork and fish; again, another with different kinds of expensive vegetables. Another carrier brought the engagement cake, and five articles of clothing, and all the silver ornaments. Everywhere, scattered among all the things, were cypress leaves, a symbol of longevity and good luck.

On reaching the Tu home, the men with their precious burdens were received with fire-crackers, and eagerly all the things were examined, some of them meeting with approval, others with disapproval. After dinner the party started off again for the Hsü home, taking the return presents. These consisted of the following articles—a hat, a pair of shoes and stockings, a sash, a number of embroidered purses, with a few dollars in them, also some vegetable seeds, peanuts, sunflower seeds, etc. Most of these things were graciously received by the young man and his family, and the parents on both sides were satisfied.

The Engagement Agreement, as binding as a marriage certificate, had been signed by the two families, and Everlasting Pearl's parents had returned it to Mr. and Mrs. Hsü. The girl of thirteen had her future settled for her before she had any idea of what such a future might mean. Her little girl-friends teased her, but there was an added respect in their treatment of her. She dimly realised that somehow she had risen in their estimation and that of others. The change was rather a pleasant one, the new clothes were a welcome addition to her scanty wardrobe, and she was too young to worry about the future.

Writing the engagement document. As binding as a marriage certificate.

**[Illustration: Writing the engagement document.
As binding as a marriage certificate.]**

[1] The Eight Cyclical Characters appertaining to the hour of a person's birth.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE—PART I

Again we pass over a few years. Everlasting Pearl had now reached the age of seventeen, and her future husband was twenty-nine years old; therefore the day of the wedding was drawing near. The intervening years between engagement and marriage had been busy ones. Little by little the trousseau had been prepared, and was all ready. A lucky day, the third of the eleventh moon, had been chosen for the approaching wedding; and already, a few days before that date, some of the guests began to arrive, each one bringing a present of some garment, or hair flowers, shoes, etc. for the bride. A present of 120 lbs. of pork, 60 lbs. of fish, 12 chickens, and a good supply of expensive vegetables had been sent by the young man, and the guests, with many of whom luxuries were rare, set themselves to enjoy the good things.

The evening before the wedding the middleman arrived with the bridal chair, which was covered all around with red cloth, and embroidered in gay colours. Now the feasting began in real earnest. The pipers struck up their usual melody, and with each hour the excitement grew.

The following morning the trousseau had to be packed, but the bride had nothing to do with it. She did not rise from her bed at all. Her breakfast was brought to her by one of her relatives, and she was exhorted to eat heartily, as that would be her last meal till the following morning. Towards dinner-time she was coaxed to get up, but she persistently refused to do so, and began bemoaning her fate, in having to leave her parents and her own home to go to strangers. Every now and again the mother joined in the wailing, and the relatives stood round them crying, trying in vain to comfort them. After dinner the bride was again urged to get up, but maidenly modesty and her dutifulness to her parents still forbade her to obey. No one should have any reason to say that she was anxious to go. She wanted to show how loath she was to leave her parents, and every one was praising her, and saying that such a dutiful daughter would make a filial daughter-in-law.

But even the most ardent filial piety could not put off the hour of separation much longer. At last she was dragged from her bed by the women who had to prepare her for her journey, and she reluctantly submitted to the preparation. Her hair was shaved all around the edges, the hair in front, which used to make the fringe for the forehead, was pulled out. Then her hair was combed straight back to show that she was now to enter the ranks of the married women. Then she was

powdered and painted, and dressed in her bridal attire, which consisted of a red skirt, and red cloak, beautifully embroidered in bright colours, but rather the worse for wear, as it had accompanied the bridal chair on many another journey. The box with the mitre was brought forth and the crown was placed on her head, already too richly adorned with artificial flowers. And now the wailing broke forth beyond all bounds, the young bride and her mother vying with each other in making the greatest possible noise; at times beating their heads against the wall, the bed, or the table in their self-imposed manifestations of sorrow.

Outside, the trousseau was being sent off, as it had to reach the bride's future home before she entered the same. Two men carried a cupboard between them. Others followed with some chairs, and a table covered with candlesticks and all kinds of utensils. A pair of the bride's shoes might also be found, placed within those of the bridegroom's, for, as every one remarked, "The two must now walk together till old age." Others carried a couple of red wooden boxes filled with the clothes and personal belongings of the bride, also a wadded bed-quilt, a bed-curtain, and two embroidered pillows, etc. The whole procession made an imposing show, and the relatives of Everlasting Pearl looked after it with pride. The girl had been well provided for, and could lift up her head without shame before her husband's people.

The bride herself was at that time kneeling in her bedroom on a large sieve (a token that all evil influences are "sifted out" and all good luck and riches "sifted in"), bidding farewell to all her relatives. One by one they were led to her, beginning with her parents and brothers, and ending with the distant relatives, neighbours, and guests. To each one she clung in despair, clutching their feet, and vowing she could not leave them; and she did not let go her hold until a coin, wrapped in red paper, was dropped into the sieve; then, with a few words of comfort, the giver would move away to make room for another, and all the time the red paper parcels increased in number.

When the farewells had nearly come to an end, the middleman urged a speedy departure, and at last, when she still delayed, he entered the room, lifted the weeping girl into his arms, and carried her out into the guest-hall. Standing on the table before the ancestral tablet, she worshipped her dead ancestors for the last time, for from henceforth they were nothing to her, as she would bear another's name. This performance over, the middleman again lifted her up like a child, and placed her in the chair. The little bride was then locked in, the key to the chair resting in the pocket of her guide. Fire-crackers were let off, the pipers

piped, and the bride, loudly wailing, was on her way to her future home.

Her brothers followed her for a short distance. After having escorted her for about a mile, they handed her the keys of her boxes and cupboard, bade her a last farewell, and returned home, leaving the middleman and his assistant to escort her all the way. Some ragged little boys were carrying the large lanterns, on which was inscribed her husband's name, in front of her chair; others carried red banners; again, others were beating gongs. One carried the big red umbrella, which only a bride or a Mandarin is allowed to have carried in front of the chair.

It was a proud day in the young girl's life. Everywhere the people crowded round to get a peep at her through the glass windows of her sedan chair. And she, sitting motionless and with bent head all the way, was conscious of the deference paid to her. All the people turned respectfully aside for the procession to pass, and even if a Mandarin had happened to meet her on the way he would have had to turn aside. For once in a lifetime the simple country girl was to be honoured by him, to whom all others had to bow, for, as he would have said, "Who knows if the bride of to-day may not bear a son, who shall far exceed me in position and power?"

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIAGE—PART II

Meanwhile the bridegroom's family had not been idle. They had prepared and decorated their house; had put up new red scrolls, and draped the guest-hall and the outside door with red cloth. Large red candles, painted with gold, were burning on a sort of mantelpiece at the top of the room, and new lanterns were adorning the hall.

The bedroom for the bride had also been prepared. A man who had been prosperous in his life and home decided where the bed was to be placed; and a woman equally prosperous in her home made the bed, and took good care that no ill-luck should come near the dwelling of the young couple.

When about a mile's distance from her future husband's home, Everlasting Pearl suddenly ceased her wailing, for it now behoved her to show the right submission. The old life lay behind her; she had mourned for it, but must now prepare for the new life ahead.

She was met by messengers from the Hsü family. The chair was put down and some superstitious rites were performed to drive away the evil influences which she might have encountered by the way. And then, as it was getting dark, the lanterns were lighted for the last stage of the journey, and soon she was carried into her new home. She entered it to the sound of fire-crackers, music, beating of gongs, and the shouts of all the people who had gathered in great numbers, each one present trying to catch the first glimpse of the bride.

The bridal chair was put down in the guest-hall, and there it remained. After what seemed an exceptionally long waiting time, the door was unlocked, but still the bride could not move. At last, a woman, the proud mother of several sons, came forward and helped her out of the chair. Two little girls, richly adorned with flowers, were waiting, one on either side of the chair, to offer her some tea. After that she was led into the room prepared for her. Her own furniture had already been placed in the room, and the bridegroom, clad in official robes, was standing near the bed, waiting for her. Then they both sat down, a table was placed before them with two basins of rice, some eggs, vermicelli, and a chicken leg for each. Not much of it was eaten, however; the little bride, still veiled, could touch nothing, but the guests, who had crowded into the room to stare at her, helped themselves freely to the rice.

After a short time the bridegroom left the room, and a little later the bride was led out to the public guest-hall, supported by two women. The young man was waiting for her. They took their stand in front of the ancestral tablet side by side, and now the real wedding ceremony began.

A wadded quilt, covered with red, was spread on a mat on the floor, the bride and bridegroom knelt down on it, and three times worshipped their ancestors, their heads touching the ground each time. Then they turned round and worshipped "Heaven and earth" in the same way. Afterwards two cups of wine were brought from the table. The man who was supporting the bridegroom offered the latter one of the cups, and the second one was held to the lips of the bride by the women in charge of her. Then the wine from the two cups was mixed, and each one took a sip from the same cup, indicating that from now on

they were united, and must share life together, whilst some of the bystanders laughingly chanted:

Together they walk, each other aid,
The knot is tied, the covenant made.

The first ceremony had come to an end. Bride and bridegroom bowed to each other, and then the latter lifted the veil, and beheld for the first time the face of the girl who had been given him to wife! The crowd was getting excited, and from all sides the shout arose:

Oh, with what joy the hour we hail,
When time has come to lift the veil.

The poor little bride was getting weary, and her bridesmaid led her back to the bedroom, closely followed by the bridegroom. For a few moments they took their stand together in front of the bed, but soon the young man went out of the room, threw off his wedding garments, and began to help in looking after the guests. Soon all of them were feasting around a number of square tables, the bridegroom being one of the busiest in ministering to them.

But the bride had not got over her ordeal. The whole evening she was made a gazing-stock to all. Any one might go in to stare at her, and acquaintances of the bridegroom and even strangers who crowded into the room were allowed to make any remarks they liked. The children were dancing around her singing:

Little bride, little bride!
You climbed the wall from the other side!

Every now and again this refrain was started, and sometimes a more mischievous boy or girl would take it up, adding another line:

Little bride, little bride!
You climbed the wall from the other side!
And to steal our potatoes moreover tried!

Later on, a table was spread in front of the bride, and a few intimate friends and relatives had their supper with her, but she herself could touch nothing. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, trying to keep calm and composed; no smile lit up her face, no word was uttered, and it was very seldom that a sentence was

addressed to her.

In the middle of the many courses, her mitre was placed on her head again, and she was led out to the guest-hall. With a wine cup in her hand, she went from table to table, and bowed low to her husband's friends. Their cups were filled afresh, and each one took a drink in honour of the bride, while the band played vigorously. After she had finished her round, she went back to her bedroom till the feasting was over.

Adorned as a bride. A proud day in the young girl's life.

[Illustration: Adorned as a bride. A proud day in the young girl's life.]

It was then getting late, and the young bridegroom entered, accompanied by his friends, who were carrying big red candles in front of him, and sending off fire-crackers. They did not leave the young people till after midnight, and not before having tried to get hold of as many of their belongings as possible. These they endeavoured to hide, and a good thing it was that the bride had got plenty of sweets, peanuts, beans, etc., for all the stolen articles had to be redeemed the following morning.

After a few short hours of rest, the young people had to get ready for breakfast, and soon afterwards the second part of the wedding ceremony began, the part which is called *Fen ta siao*, which, literally translated, means "To distinguish between great and small." Bride and bridegroom were arrayed once more in their wedding robes, and proceeded to the guest-hall where all the relatives were assembled. Again the two knelt together on the red quilt, bowing their heads three times to the ground before Mr. and Mrs. Hsü, who bowed in return. Mr. Hsü threw down the keys of the household before the young people. He had, however, no thought of giving them any responsibility, and every intention of getting the keys back into his own pockets and keeping them there.

Then the uncles and aunts were led forward, to whom was paid the same respect. The brothers, cousins, and other relatives came next, but being of the same generation as the bride and bridegroom, they also knelt down and "worshipped" them in return. Each relative put a piece of money, wrapped in red paper, on a tray placed there for that purpose, and, when filled, it was carried to the bride's room until a more convenient time was found for the counting of the

money.

The whole party, headed by the bridegroom and the bride, then proceeded to the kitchen for the purpose of worshipping the kitchen god. The bridegroom carried a rice measure with a lamp placed in it, the bride a brush for cleaning the cooking pan. Many superstitious rites are connected with the worship in the kitchen, the smallest detail has its own meaning, but it would be too tedious to relate all.

The dinner came next, and this time the bride had to take the seat of honour at the top table, but once seated there, she remained as silent as the night before, and ate nothing. Again she went round to bow to the guests at the different tables, who all stood up and solemnly drank her health.

After dinner she was allowed to put off her bridal attire, and wear some of the clothes sent her by her husband. She was also permitted to throw off some of the reserve of the past days, and could talk more freely to those around her.

The following day a messenger arrived from Mr. and Mrs. Tu, inviting the young couple to return to the bride's home for dinner. They were both carried in sedan chairs, and had to wear most of their wedding garments again. They were very careful and modest in their behaviour,—young Hsü especially was afraid of offending in word or deed,—and they were not sorry when, soon after the formal dinner, they could once more return home. Another formal visit had to be paid, about two months later, at the beginning of the Chinese New Year, to the bride's home, but then a more free and natural relationship was established between the two families.

CHAPTER VII

DARK DAYS

The home Everlasting Pearl had entered was not a rich one. The members were all simple, hard-working people, ordinary country farmers who had to earn their living by the sweat of their brow. But they were honest and peace-loving,

and the five brothers worked together in unity. Although one of the Chinese sages had said:

Let brotherly love in the home abound
And to gold will be changed the dust of the ground,

the gold seemed a long time coming to the Hsü family. They were able by steady work to make a comfortable living at their farming, but there was little over to make a fortune. On the whole, Everlasting Pearl was moderately happy. Her husband was quite satisfied with his bright young wife, and treated her kindly. The mother-in-law was rather hard on her and inconsiderate, but the father-in-law loved her as a daughter, and made things as easy as possible. Her husband's brothers, too, were kind, and she went about her common task cheerfully, quite ready to take her share in the household work.

Four years passed peacefully, but no child came to gladden the home, and that was a sore disappointment to the young people. The mother-in-law too was disappointed, and did not look very kindly on the young wife who was trying so hard to do her duty. Old Mr. Hsü had left this world. For three days and nights the Taoist priests had come to chant their formulas, promising to cleanse the house from evil spirits, and to break open the door of hell and rescue the soul of the departed father. There was real sorrow in Everlasting Pearl's heart as she knelt near the coffin wailing. The old man had been like a father to her, and had helped her over many rough places. She knew things would be harder without him, but little did she realize what heavy trials awaited her. A merciful God had hidden the knowledge from her sight, or her inborn courage might have failed.

During the fifth year of Everlasting Pearl's married life her sorrows began. Twice within a few months she was summoned to the deathbed of her loved ones. She first knelt mourning at the grave of her father; and then, before that sorrow had had time to lose its sting, she was throwing herself in agony over the body of her dead mother, the mother who had always loved her so tenderly. And death was fearful to her. The "three souls and seven spirits" had evidently all taken their departure. Where had they gone? If only she knew, the separation would not be so hard. But there was no one to solve the mystery for her; no ray of light to dispel the darkness and fear that crept over her; no hope of a reunion; no Resurrection Morning to look forward to, and therefore no comfort to lighten her sorrow.

But greater trials were yet in store. The brothers did not work quite so well

together after old Mr. Hsü's death, and decided to divide their fields between them, which they did equally and peacefully, and each one set up for himself. Everlasting Pearl and her husband worked harder than ever, as now all the profit they made would be their own. The harvest promised to be a good one. In the beginning of the sixth moon, after the early crops of rice had been cut, they ate their new rice on the day appointed by the Mandarin. Before touching any of the food they took it to the temple near by, and earnestly invoked the blessing of the gods on the new grain, after which they sat down to partake of it without any fear of sickness or trouble coming to them that year.

But alas! Only a few days later the husband was taken ill, and day by day became worse. The wife was naturally anxious, and when his illness deprived him of his reason, her cup of sorrow seemed full. For three years he was raving mad, and often, when in one of his fits of rage, he would ill-treat his wife. These fits might come on without any warning, day or night, so that she was kept in constant fear.

These were dark days indeed for the young wife. Not only had she to nurse her husband, but she was obliged to do a great deal of his work in the fields, although it required a man's strength. Bravely she plodded on, but often lost heart and gave herself up to her sorrow. If only her parents or her father-in-law had been alive, they would have comforted her. If only she were not so alone in the world. If only she had had a child of her own to love and to work for, she could have borne it better. Many a time she would repeat the sad cry of the childless wife:

No son, no daughter to call my own,
Thus daily my pitiful lot I bemoan!

How hard it was to be all alone, without a refuge to turn to, without some one to share her sorrow. How her heart longed for comfort, but there was none to give it. How she needed a friend to stand by her, but none was found. Alas! no one had told her of "the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." She was so weary and burdened, but no one had ever whispered in her ear the sweet and tender invitation of the great Rest-Giver: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." No one around her knew of that blessed invitation, for the messengers to whom it had been entrusted had been sleeping and taking their rest, neglecting their Lord's command, and forgetting that "the King's business requireth haste."

CHAPTER VIII

MISERABLE COMFORTERS

The case of Everlasting Pearl's husband was a hopeless one, and despair took possession of both mother and wife as time went on. They exhausted all the means in their power, but very soon realized that vain was the help of man, for the doctors could do nothing for him. They then turned to the spirits and implored their help. In these surely they would not be disappointed.

First of all they sent to a medium to ask what was the matter. She told them that the sick man had lost a soul, and they would have to go out and find it. A party of them, therefore, quickly set out, carrying a measure of rice, which they strewed by the way to show the spirit the direction home. At every step Everlasting Pearl frantically called out, "My husband, come home, come home." Each time, when her cry arose, the rest of the party answered with assurance, "He has come home, he has come home." But when they returned, after their weary tramp, the lost soul had not found its way home, and there was no improvement in the condition of the patient.

A few days later, the mother decided that they would have to call in a Taoist priest for a ceremony called *kan tong*, or "influence." In the middle of the afternoon, when the spirits were supposed to have come out of their hiding-places, the priest started his work. Three men were beating the gong and drum most vigorously, while he himself took three sticks of incense and worshipped the idol hanging before him. Then he drew a tiger on two pieces of paper, put them down on the ground, and called for the chosen medium. A relative of young Hsü, with a red turban round his head, stepped forward, and took his stand somewhat reluctantly on the tigers. He had seen other mediums return with their bodily and mental health impaired, and he had no desire to risk his own; but his duty and brotherly love bade him perform this service for his young kinsman.

The priest now began chanting his formulas to the beating of the gong, keeping his eyes steadfastly fixed on the medium, watching for the latter to show signs of being mesmerized. After a time, when the pupils of the eyes began to

dilate, and when the man started jumping, as the tigers were unable to keep his feet quiet any longer, the priest asked, "Have you seen light?" The medium answered in the affirmative, and off he dashed, whilst a number prepared to follow him. They were horribly painted and armed with pitchforks. On and on they rushed, calling for the soul. Anything more devilish can hardly be imagined. Suddenly the medium stopped in one of the fields, and declared that that was the place where the soul had been lost. Lighting their incense, they called loudly for the soul, till the medium rushed off home again, telling them the soul would return with them, and the sick man would recover. But again the gods had played them false, for the sick man got worse instead of better.

What was to be done next? An astrologer's advice was sought, and readily given. He informed them that they had made a mistake the first time, when they called in the Taoist priest, and that the wrong ceremony had been performed. They must call in four Taoist priests to perform for a day and a night, so as to drive away the evil spirits which had taken possession of the sick man. The house was accordingly decorated with idols on all sides, and the four priests began their work. The noise in the house was almost unbearable, and thus it continued for twenty-four hours, after which time the priests announced young Hsü to be out of danger, as the evil spirits had taken their departure. In reality there was only one thing that had taken its departure, and that was the money possessed by the Hsü family, which had now found its way into the roomy pockets of the priests.

The young wife was almost in despair. But it never occurred to her, or to any one else in the family, to blame the idols or the priests. Very likely they had not done enough for the sick man. They would call the Taoist priests again, and let them go on for three days and three nights. But where was the money to come from? A consultation was held, and it was decided to mortgage the fields in order to get the money needed. Of course it would mean poverty afterwards, but that point could not be considered just now; all that mattered was to get the young man well again. So the fields were mortgaged, and the priests were more than pleased to come again. Needless to say they succeeded no better than before, but that did not trouble them.

At last the whole family gave up in despair. It was true there was still the rite called "The turning of tables," but that was too expensive, and there was no money left for it. Nothing more could be done. Young Hsü would have to be left to his fate, and they had to resign themselves and make the best of their

difficulties.

CHAPTER IX

BROKEN CISTERNS

Time dragged wearily on in that afflicted household, and Everlasting Pearl walked about with a heavy heart. Her brothers-in-law felt sorry for her, and several times offered to kill her husband, or get rid of him somehow, thinking they might do the young wife a service. But she refused to accept their offer, and said she would much rather do his work, and earn what was necessary to supply his needs as well as her own. He had been kind to her, and had worked for her in earlier years, and now, in his weakness, it was her turn to work for him.

Day after day and month after month she toiled on, through hard work and sorrow and trials, often suffering herself both in body and mind; and all this had to be borne without a shadow of comfort. She knew nothing about the "God of all comfort," and had never heard of Him who "day by day beareth our burden." No wonder she was at times almost driven to despair, and cried out for a ray of light in the darkness, for a flicker of hope amid the hopeless condition and sad chaos of her life. Through all the bitter days of suffering her mind was turned to the things hereafter, and she determined that if she had to toil and suffer here she would, if at all possible, do something to escape the suffering in the life to come. But how should she begin? What was she to do? Was there anything that could give her aching heart some comfort, her despairing soul some hope? Was it possible to flee from the suffering in the next world? for that such existed she was sure, and her heart cried out for deliverance.

In the neighbourhood a great many vegetarians resided, and one day, when Everlasting Pearl was engaged in irrigating the field, a woman, one of the leaders among the vegetarians, passed by. Of course she knew all about the trouble of the young wife, and stopped to speak to her. Everlasting Pearl instantly ceased her work. The sun was just then at its hottest stage, and as she had been standing the whole morning exposed to its scorching rays, doing work which was far too heavy for any woman, her tired body was glad of a moment's

rest. The kind words of the woman went to her heart, so she soon confided all her troubles to her. The listener had only one way of helping her, and began to exhort her to become a vegetarian for life. She offered to look upon her as a daughter, and declared herself willing to instruct her in the vegetarian doctrine.

Everlasting Pearl eagerly reached out after the comfort promised. The necessary rosary was bought. She went to the leaders of the vegetarian sect, and told them of her decision. They gladly welcomed her among their number, gave her a book and the necessary instructions, with many exhortations to be steadfast in the way she had begun to walk. If she remained firm to the end, they promised her what her heart desired, a life hereafter without any suffering. Through her life as a vegetarian she would be accumulating merit day by day, and would be able to lay up such a large store for herself that she would not have to pass through all the usual stages of transmigration in the next world, but would be able to go straight to the goal she had set before her, the "Western Heaven," or "Paradise."

Everlasting Pearl started as a vegetarian when she was twenty-two years old, at the advice of the woman whom, from that time on, she adopted as her mother. She did so in uprightness of heart, seeking after the truth, and as determination and steadfastness were two very strong traits in her character, she found it easier than many others to keep to what she had promised.

Seldom had the vegetarian cause had a more decided and devout follower than she was, and Everlasting Pearl soon won a name among the members of her faith, and far beyond that circle. She was deeply respected, not only for her steadfastness of purpose, but also for her general conduct, which was in the eyes of men blameless. Every evening, when her day's work was done, she would take down her beads, and, kneeling down before the picture of Buddha, would repeat over and over again *O-mi-to-fuh*—"In Buddha do I put my trust," counting her beads all the time. Sometimes she continued till far into the night; thousands of times she would count her rosary, trying to persuade herself that she had found relief from her suffering. In reality her heart remained empty and devoid of any true comfort. The longer she went on, the more her assurance grew. After all, it was the next world she was working for, and all things would come out right in the end.

But God, who looks upon the intents and motives of the heart, saw this poor, struggling soul trying to grope her way in the darkness, and determined to work

out her own salvation, since she had no one to show her the true way. In His love and pity He had laid up a better inheritance for her, and in His own way, all unknown to her, He began to lay His plans for bringing her into contact with His children and the messengers of Peace. Slowly, but surely, all things worked together for her good, and for the salvation of her soul.

CHAPTER X

WAYS NOT KNOWN

As mentioned previously, Everlasting Pearl's husband was raving mad for three years. Then he took a turn for the better, but was still insane and unable to do any work. For seven years he remained in that condition, and then, when death knocked at the door, it seemed to bring relief to the members of the family.

A few months later Everlasting Pearl was persuaded to marry a widower, a quiet, honest tailor, who lived at Kucheng. So she returned to the place of her birth, and found a real home awaiting her. Mr. Lü, her husband, was a man of sterling worth, and soon a real affection sprang up between them. Mrs. Lü, for as such Everlasting Pearl will now appear, was very happy, and fully appreciated her change of circumstances.

Mr. Lü had three little children when his new wife entered his home; but about a month later one child died. He had been ill for some time, and Mrs. Lü's motherly care could not save him from death. A second son died three years later, apparently from the same illness, both seeming to waste away. Their mother had died from consumption, and evidently her weakness had affected the children. Only one child, a brother's son, remained, and Mrs. Lü took him to her loving heart. The lad, in his turn, lavished all his childish affection on her, for she was a real mother to him.

About two years after her marriage to Mr. Lü, the latter was asked by a neighbour, who was a seeker after the Truth, to accompany him to the Gospel Hall. We were then holding meetings in the house of a Christian, who lived in a village about two miles' distance from Kucheng. But Mr. Lü, being a very

nervous man, felt shy about going and shrank from meeting strangers, especially when these appeared in the form of foreigners. Moreover, he was loath to give up his time without having a sure compensation for it, as he was hard-working, and did not like to spend an hour in vain. So he refused to go.

Another two years passed by. The Boxer troubles had quietened down, and the workers who had returned were again holding meetings in the little village near Kucheng. The place was very hard, the Christians cold, and the man in whose house the services were held was not on good terms with the other Church members in the village. One Sunday, when the writer was there, her heart was specially heavy. The coldness was appalling, and she came to the point where she said, "Lord, I cannot go on with the work here. If Thou dost not show forth Thy mighty power in doing a new thing in this place, I must give it up!" The spiritual battle was a fearful and exhausting one. Returning home to the central station, she told her fellow-workers how she felt, and all set to pray for that place as never before, claiming victory from the Lord. A month later, the writer visited that centre again in fear and trembling; but the Lord had already begun to work. He was manifestly in the midst, and it was easily realized that God had granted a real answer to prayer.

In one of the meetings one of the Christians humbly confessed his sin before God, and asked for forgiveness and for strength to walk in newness of life. Another Christian gave a bright testimony. Life was beginning to get into the dead bones. That Sunday morning, too, a new enquirer came to the meetings, and stayed for the whole day. His presence there seemed to be a promise of coming blessing. And this impression was not wrong, for the following month a few others came with him, some of them from Kucheng. One of these enquirers invited Mr. Lü to the services, and this time he consented. Well does the writer remember the first Sunday he came. His face and manner alike were altogether out of the ordinary, and somehow, from the very beginning, a conviction was received that God had chosen him for Himself. From that very day a work was begun in his heart.

Soon the little meeting-place became too small for the congregation, and a house was rented at Kucheng. Many enquirers had gathered around this centre, some with mixed motives, it is true. There were those who only came for worldly advantages, and these soon dropped off. Others were touched by the Spirit of God, and a real work was begun in their hearts. But two or three years later, when they had to make their decision for or against Christ, when they had

to count the cost, which in some cases was a heavy one, they were not willing to pay the price, and gradually grew cold and indifferent. Some of them caused real disappointment, as they had been so bright and promising. But there were a few who went steadily on, and among them was Mr. Lü. He never wavered, never missed a Sunday. Although in the beginning he used to do some pressing work after the Sunday meetings, it was pointed out to him one night that it was not only he who should keep the day of rest, but all within his house. He listened and understood, and the next morning, being Sunday, he brought his son to the services. From that day he never sent him to work again on the Sunday. To those who knew that Mr. Lü had never wasted an hour before, or let his work stop for any pleasure of his own, it was a real miracle that he should now be willing to allow his whole household rest on Sunday. What had happened to the man? What power was there in that strange religion that could make him forgo all the money a weekly day of rest meant to him and his family? What was it that had given the timid and reserved man courage to speak out freely about the new life that had opened up before him, and had made him strong to stand against all the ridicule that was heaped upon him in many of the houses where he worked? A God who could bring about such a change was a God indeed.

From the very beginning, Mr. Lü showed unusual understanding about spiritual things. Was it not because he believed God and took Him simply at His word? He never attempted to bring in his own wisdom, never leaned to his own understanding. Very often, when asked questions about spiritual matters, his answers would cause astonishment and surprise. The Spirit of God was taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto him, and day by day his faith grew stronger and his trust in the Lord firmer.

CHAPTER XI

THE MESSENGERS OF PEACE

When first Mr. Lü began to attend the services his wife did not like it. She exhorted him to continue in the old way, living a quiet and respectable life lest he should be involved in difficulties and trouble because of his friendship with the foreigners. But when she saw that his mind was made up, she left him alone.

The writer's first acquaintance with Mrs. Lü dates back to the spring of 1902, when the out-station at Kucheng was opened. The house that was rented adjoined that belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Lü, and when the writer, in company with a Christian woman who was to fill the office of chapel-keeper, arrived in Kucheng late one evening, Mr. and Mrs. Lü were there to receive us. The enquirers had had the house cleaned up and prepared for our coming, and the key to the house had been given to Mr. Lü. His wife's mind was rather in a state of confusion. She tried to persuade herself that the coming of this strange religion, which seemed to take a wonderful hold on the minds of people, could be nothing to her, as her way was the only right one. But, of course, she must be neighbourly. Moreover, the strangers were friends of her husband, and her loyalty to him bade her do all in her power to be kind to the new-comers. Thus it came about that she, together with her husband, gave us a hearty welcome, and informed us that supper had already been prepared. Our heart went out to Mrs. Lü, and very soon a firm friendship was established. She was exceedingly kind, but there she stopped. She was very pleased to see her husband and other members of the family becoming Christians, and even exhorted them to be steadfast and give their whole hearts to what they believed. But they were not to ask her to accept their creed. She must go her own way, and pursue the path she had marked out for herself for so many years. The doctrine was very good, she said, and she did not mind attending the meetings. That could not do her any harm, as she intended to go no further. Thus everything went on smoothly, Satan left her in peace, whilst others kept on praying for her and claiming this precious soul for the Lord. It was impossible not to realize what a power this woman would have for good, if only she were won for the Master, and very soon some of us received the assurance that one day she would become a trophy of His grace.

The out-station at Kucheng. The place where Everlasting Pearl was converted.

**[Illustration: The out-station at Kucheng.
The place where Everlasting Pearl was converted.]**

All during that summer Mrs. Lü continued to attend the meetings, and she enjoyed them thoroughly. In spite of herself she got more and more interested in what she saw and heard. In the autumn of that year the writer stayed at Kucheng for a fortnight, and while there held Bible Study for the men twice a week, and although visiting some of the villages around, gave a good deal of time in teaching the women and children to read. Mrs. Lü came as usual, and as she was more intelligent than the average Chinese woman, she not only obtained a good deal of knowledge concerning salvation in Christ Jesus, but learned to read quite a little and enjoyed it with all her heart.

Something happened at that time which made a great impression on her mind. Early one morning a dreadful quarrel broke out in Mr. Lü's house. It seemed incredible, as they were a very affectionate family. But there was no doubt about it; Mrs. Lü had completely lost her temper with her brother, and was scolding and swearing like any other Chinese woman. For a while the writer kept quiet, but as the quarrel continued and increased, we dressed quickly, and made our way to the place from which the angry voices came. Mr. Lü was sitting there, meekly listening, and evidently on his wife's side, but not opening his lips, while Mrs. Lü could not control her voice for anger. The writer, putting her hand on Mrs. Lü's shoulder, said, "Mrs. Lü, what are you doing this morning? I never heard you like this before." Then she narrated all, and added, "If only he would keep quiet and not answer back, I would get over my anger; but when he retaliates, I lose my temper altogether, and he ought to have done what I told him!" We said it was quite true, but she was wrong in saying all these things against her brother, which she really did not mean, and which would only rile him instead of bringing him to his sense of duty. After being exhorted to keep quiet, she calmed down.

When returning home, we met the brother, who had been hiding in the kitchen, and had evidently been listening to what had been said to his sister. Going up to him we said, "Look here, you know you are in the wrong. Your sister has your good at heart, and has only asked you to do what it was your duty to do. Now say nothing more about it, but go and do it, and you will all have peace again." He looked very shamefaced for a moment, then he got the victory and said, "Very well, I will do it." And with that he went out to do his work, and the quarrel was ended.

But the best result was yet to follow in two hearts. Towards noon Mrs. Lü appeared, looking very sad and dejected. She said how miserable she was because she had given way to anger; that after all these years of trying to live uprightly and do her duty by all, she had no control over herself when she was roused to anger. "So that is all your many years of vegetarianism have done for you," the writer added. The tears started to her eyes, and she answered, "That is all. I have no more control over myself than I had seventeen years ago, when I first started as a vegetarian." Solemnly and tenderly we pointed her to the cleansing and keeping power of Christ. She listened eagerly, for her heart was sad and weary.

Her brother, as yet, had not been willing to come to the meetings, although his brother-in-law had tried earnestly to persuade him to do so. But that night he walked in and smiled happily, evidently glad that the little domestic scene had ended so well. So there was a double victory won, for from that time he came off and on, till about a year later, when he started to come regularly, and ultimately became a real enquirer after the Truth. When the writer left for home in November it was impossible not to praise God for all the blessing He had given in Kucheng, and to hope and pray for greater things.

CHAPTER XII

THE BEGINNING OF CONFLICT

A few weeks went by, and then Miss M—— paid a visit to Kucheng. On her return she said that Mrs. Lü had stopped coming to the meetings, as she was frightened. At night she was haunted by horrible dreams, and was afraid she had sinned against her cause in learning our doctrine, and in listening to the preaching of the Word. So she stayed away altogether, and began reciting her prayers to Buddha more diligently than ever before. She determined never to give up her vow, but to go steadily on, and to be even more earnest in the future, so that if possible she might find peace and rest for her soul.

In that state we found her when next we visited the place. She was so unhappy. Till late into the night she could be heard counting her beads, and

reciting her *O-mi-to-fuh*, in earnest and pleading tones.

One Sunday, after the meeting, her husband took down the idols and burned them publicly. Even to please his wife he could not leave them any longer. The ancestral tablet was destroyed the same day, and some Christian scrolls and pictures were hung up, to show that henceforth the Lord Jesus was to be Master in the house instead of Satan. His real power was to take the place of the imagined power at the disposal of the idols. Mr. Lü was so happy when his house was cleansed from everything idolatrous, and we heartily rejoiced with him, praising God for his salvation and for his bright testimony.

But as for Mrs. Lü, her face was a picture of sadness. She had not dared to come to the meeting, but came privately afterwards. We asked her why she had been sitting alone and miserable in her own house, when she might have been gathering with others joyfully before the Lord. The tears started to her eyes, as she answered, "I do want to come, oh so much, but I dare not, I dare not!" When asked what she was going to do now, as all the idols had been burned, she said she would have to recite her prayers without a Buddha to burn incense to.

"What about your beads? Where are they going to be hung?"

"Oh, I don't know. My husband says they cannot be hung on the wall beside the Word of God."

"You will have to put them in the bedroom."

"That will not do either, for my husband shares that with me, and he will not have them there."

"Well, then, you must make a corner somewhere in the house, all to yourself," we told her laughingly, but not laughing in our heart.

Her suffering was evident to all; and one day one of the enquirers suggested that her husband should secretly give her an egg to eat, and so break her vow. Turning round, he said, "No, I do not want to do this, but will continue to pray for her. When the Holy Spirit opens her understanding, she will break it herself." This gave us an opportunity of telling him and all present that the Lord would not compel any one to serve Him, but wanted a willing people. We must wait, until in His light she would see light, and realize her nothingness and the utter vanity of her own striving after righteousness. So she was left with Him who

was able to remove the veil from her face, and lead her into the true and living way, fully assured that He had already begun a gracious work in her heart.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE GROWS FIERCER

At that time the Lord began to prepare Mrs. Lü's heart through dreams and visions, as is so often His way in heathen countries. Once after her husband had forbidden her to have idols and burn incense in his house, she was sitting alone in the evening, feeling dejected and forlorn, and sadly counting her beads to herself. At last she grew too weary to continue and sought her pillow. That night she dreamed that some one she had never seen before came to her, put his foot on her breast, and said, "And still you will continue to recite your prayers to Buddha!" She awoke terrified, and for a long time was unable to shake off the fear that had laid hold of her heart.

Another time one of the Biblewomen had been telling her about the Lord being the great Physician, and that He was able to heal her from the infirmities she had had since the time she had been working too hard for her strength. When she went to rest that evening she dreamed that she saw a rope, in the shape of a circle, swinging between heaven and earth, and on it an old man was standing. After a while he came close up to her, and said, "Trust me, I have come to heal you." When she awoke, she was wondering if it was God who had appeared to her in a vision.

Time after time, when we visited Kucheng, she would tell us of her experiences, her dreams and visions, her fears and conflicts. Night after night she would dream that somebody was setting meat and fish before her, tempting her to eat, whilst she turned away determined not to be tempted, not to defile herself, not to lose the merit she had stored up for herself all these many years. Day and night her mind was in confusion. She dreaded the night with its visions, and could not welcome the day that would only bring her unrest. In her agony she cried out, "No, I will never go back. I will be steadfast to the very end, and keep my vow till death. Others may walk their different ways, but no one shall

make me change. I have never doubted, have never been vacillating, and am not going to be so now."

Oh! how she longed for peace, but none came to end all her struggles, for they only increased. But God had chosen her for Himself, and could not give her heart rest until it rested in Him for whom it was made. But she did not see that all her struggles were "cords of love" with which the Father was trying to draw her to Himself. One day she said to me, "If you only knew what I suffer. But it is impossible to put into words what I have been passing through. It is as if two mighty powers were fighting about me, and I am just torn between the two." "Quite true," we answered; "two great Powers, God and the Devil, are fighting for you; both want you, but God will conquer." It was pitiful to behold her sufferings. We had never seen any conflict like it in China, and our heart cried out to the Lord for the deliverance which we knew must surely come.

The following day she spoke again about her two dreams. She dreamed that with many others she went to worship a removed idol, the one she had so often looked upon with awe in her childhood days. One after another went to kneel down before the idol, worshipping it, and praying for health and happiness. But when, after some time of patient waiting, her turn came, something strange happened. She was just about to kneel down, when the idol took off his hat, and showed her his head, which was bald from a loathsome skin disease. He told her he was false all through, and she was not to worship him. Why should he reveal to her what he had hidden from the other worshippers? When she awoke she kept pondering over the meaning of it all.

Another dream was that she was trying to settle a quarrel, and in doing so received a wound in her leg. She looked down to where the cut was, and to her horror she saw no flesh revealed, but only straw. She examined it closely, but it seemed to be the same all through; she had nothing but straw inside, and she turned from the sight that had met her eyes in horror and despair. She was not able to get away from that dream, feeling quite sure that it had some special teaching in it for her, and she turned to the writer to help her understand what it might mean. Recognizing that the dream was from God, that He was teaching her through these visions, we lifted our heart to God in prayer. We were standing beside a stack of straw in Mrs. Lü's yard. Pulling out one straw, and showing it to her, we said, "Do you see that straw? Now, how much is it worth? You just touch it and it is broken. There is no real value in it. Suppose you take a match and set fire to this whole stack of straw, in a few minutes all would be burned up,

nothing but ashes would remain. As with this straw, so will it be with all the merit you think you have stored up for the life to come. The Word of God says that everything which is not built on Christ as the foundation is wood, hay, and stubble, and shall be burned up. So all your supposed merit will vanish when the day of reckoning comes. There is no real, lasting value in it; it will all be burned up, only the ashes will remain, and you will have nothing with which to appear before God. But all that is built on Christ Jesus will abide."

This interpretation may not appeal to Western minds, but it made a deep impression on Mrs. Lü, and we believe it was the message God meant for her. That night she came again to the meeting. She could stay away no longer, the time of her deliverance was drawing nigh.

CHAPTER XIV

LIGHT AFTER DARKNESS

Quite a few weeks elapsed before we went to Kucheng again, and during that interval nothing had been heard of Mrs. Lü. But we had not been silent before the Throne of Grace. When we reached Kucheng, several met us at the gate, shouting, "We have good news for you, which will give you great joy; Mrs. Lü is now your friend indeed, she has broken her vow, and has been eating meat for the first time to-day!" That was good news indeed, and there is no need to tell what joy this news brought; indeed, it would be impossible to do so. How we did praise God for having answered prayer and given such a glorious deliverance. And that song of praise rose higher when we heard from Mrs. Lü's own lips the full story of God's dealings with her.

She met us with a radiant face, and began immediately to tell how it was the Lord Himself who had constrained her to yield. No other power or person could have done so. The story must be told in her own words.

"After you had left me," she said, "I was still restless and could find no peace. As the days passed by, I became more and more miserable, and at night my sleep was disturbed by all kinds of dreams. I knew I ought to trust God and break my

vow, but I could not. I felt I must go on in the way I had walked for so long, and I determined again not to turn to anything or to anybody else. But one night, in my dream, I saw the old tailor who is living with us and who is earnestly seeking after God, standing before me in new, beautiful garments. He was altogether changed, and oh how glorious he was. At that moment, when I was overwhelmed with the appearance of the old man, I caught sight of some blood which seemed to flow from his heart, and I cried out, 'That is the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, which has cleansed away his sin. That is why he is so beautiful.' How I wished I were like him!

"After that I awoke, but soon went to sleep again, and then another vision came. Some one with supernatural strength caught hold of me. His grasp was so firm that I had no power to move a finger, and I screamed out, asking him to free me. But he answered, 'Unless you promise to give up your vegetarian vow, I will not let you go.' Now I knew it was the Lord speaking to me, and in my terror I cried out, 'Yes, Lord, I will, I will give up my vow.' Still He kept His hold on me, and said, 'Unless you promise that you will not only give up your vow, but repent with your whole heart, I will not let you go.' Again I replied, 'Yes, Lord, I will repent with my whole heart, only let me go, and I will serve Thee.' As soon as I had promised, He let me go, and I awoke, feeling so free and happy. My chains were gone, my fetters broken, and all my unrest had departed.

"The following day I kept repeating, 'Lord, I have repented. I have promised to serve Thee, and I will keep my promise to the very end.' My heart is filled with joy and peace, and now I want to tell you that you may not worry or be anxious about me any more. You have fought the battle with me, you have prayed much for me, you have often felt sad and anxious about me, but now you can be at rest. It is God Himself who has made me take this step, who was too strong for me, and there is no turning back."

That was Mrs. Lü's story. What joy it brought to us as we stood and listened to that testimony. She had spoken truly, "there was no turning back," and so there was only grateful praise in our heart, no fear for the future, for the victory had been won once for all. Mrs. Lü's conversion was like that of the Apostle Paul, a radical change; and like him she began to preach boldly the Truth in Christ Jesus. All who saw and heard her marvelled and could not understand what had brought about such a change. Over and over again she had to tell the wonderful story of her conversion, and it made a deep impression on many.

The vegetarian leaders were angry, and came time after time to try and win her back, sometimes by earnest pleading, at other times by threats and denunciations. But she remained firm, and to each party confessed that it was God who had called her. It was in His almighty power that she had been constrained to give up her vow and seek salvation in Christ Jesus, and she could not resist Him. He had done for her what no human power could ever have accomplished. She told them it was no use trying to persuade her to go back, for she would never serve any one but the Lord Jesus, so they might as well leave her in peace to go her own road. Her old friends and instructors did not like it, but while they threatened, she remained calm and spoke kindly to them, and even suggested that they too should believe; whereupon they began to curse her in their rage.

Steadily Mrs. Lü went on growing in the knowledge of Christ. She continued her reading, and soon began to teach others. About six or seven months later she and her husband were baptized together into the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They returned to their home, full of joy in the Lord, and with the earnest desire to live for Him who had died for them, and to show forth His salvation from day to day.

CHAPTER XV

SAVED TO SERVE

But the story does not end here. It is possible to go on to tell a little of the life of Mrs. Lü as a follower of Him whose Name she bears. The more we saw of Mr. and Mrs. Lü the more we loved and appreciated them, and many happy hours were spent in true fellowship with them and a few other Christians at Kucheng. We felt indeed that we were one family, united in one Lord and Master and in His service. As they lived next door to the chapel they had special opportunities for service, and the way in which they took up the responsibility of the place, and of the people there, often awakened surprise. At times it seemed as though they were taking too great a share in the burden. But they did it so joyfully that it was not easy to restrain them.

When any newcomer attended the meeting, who did not know the rule that each person must bring his own dinner with him, Mr. and Mrs. Lü would invite him to their house, "just to make him feel at home the first time"; and they did it in such a way that the visitor did not feel that he was receiving any grace from their hands. If, after some of the Christians had gathered together on a Sunday, it began to snow or rain, Mr. and Mrs. Lü would persuade them to stay with them for dinner—"Just that we may be able to have the afternoon meeting together," they would say quietly. When remonstrated with about doing too much, they answered cheerfully, "Oh, we like to do it. We put two or three loads of rice aside for that purpose every year. We give that to the Lord who has blessed us so greatly." What more could be said? They were doing it joyfully for the Master, and He who "is not unrighteous to forget the labour of love" done for Him and for His sake, will surely reward them "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." And He did reward them even here.

When they had been coming to the services for about a year, they were asked if they had any want, or if they had lost that year, seeing they had given all their Sundays and many evenings, whereas they had worked hard all the time in former years. They replied that they had lost nothing, but had a greater surplus at the end of the year than formerly. And the following year that surplus increased, and they declared laughingly, "Why, we are richer than ever." Is not this a practical testimony to the way in which God keeps His promise—"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you"?

They also taught some of us practical lessons, which will not soon be forgotten. One year they had some building and repairs done, and had a number of workmen working for them by the day. When Saturday came, the question was what was to be done with all these men for the Sunday. The men said they must go on working, or leave for a few days, as they could not begin work somewhere else for one day. Mr. and Mrs. Lü were in great need of their house; and yet what were they to do, for they felt they could not let the men work for them on the day of rest? The whole day they were ill at ease, but towards evening Mrs. Lü said to her husband, "I know what we will do. We will just give them their food and their wages the same as any other day, but tell them they need not work. And then those who are willing can come with us to the meetings."

"But what about the money for all these men?"

"The Lord is able to give that back to us in some other way," she said, "and, at any rate, we shall have the assurance that we have done our best to let them have a chance of hearing the Gospel." So it was all settled, and their hearts were at rest.

The writer arrived at Kucheng that Saturday evening, and was surprised to see some of the workmen in the meeting, listening very attentively. The following day, Sunday, three of them came again, but others went to some of the shops for a talk and a smoke.

"But why are you not working to-day? How can you play about like this?" thus some of the shopkeepers addressed them.

"We were working at Mr. Lü's house, but he told us not to do any work to-day."

"But how can you afford to lose a day's money like that?"

"We do not lose anything. Mr. and Mrs. Lü give us our board and wages, just as if we were working for them the whole day."

"Well, that is strange. They used to be careful over their money, and they seem to be so even now."

"That is quite true, but they say they will not sin against their God in making us work for them on Sunday."

"That doctrine about Jesus is really good: surely there must be something in it."

Thus the people reasoned, and it need hardly be said that Mr. and Mrs. Lü, through their steady and careful walk with God, gained a respect among the people which only few in their position could attain. It was to them that the people came in sickness and sorrow, counting upon their help and prayers. It was from them they sought advice when in perplexity and uncertainty. And it was in their home the Christians

CHAPTER XVI

PERSECUTION AND TRIAL

Things did not always go smoothly for Mr. and Mrs. Lü, and the narrow way was not always easy to tread. As followers of Christ they had to share in His sufferings, in His being rejected and despised by the world. They had to learn by practical experience that "the servant is not above his Lord," that if they had persecuted Him, the Lord of Glory, they would also persecute His followers. A share in His rejection must, in greater or smaller measure, fall to the lot of every true believer, and Mr. and Mrs. Lü were not excepted. Persecutions, threats, and even cursings were not lacking, but as those who uttered them received only meek answers and kind treatment in return, some of them, at least, very soon became ashamed of themselves, and left Mr. Lü and his wife alone. The Lord was on their side, and did not allow their persecutors to go a step beyond His control; and His servants found that it was easier to go all lengths with Christ, than to serve Him in a half-hearted way, as they saw some others doing.

When the annual theatre was held in Kucheng and every one subscribed to meet the expenses, the collectors came as usual to Mr. Lü's house. Of course he and his wife refused, saying they had given up idolatry and could not subscribe to the theatre in future. The collectors began to curse, but found Mr. and Mrs. Lü steadfast in their refusal.

"We are quite willing to entertain you," they said, "we are quite ready to provide dinner for you to-day, to show you that it is not a question of money, but we cannot and will not give money for idol-worship and stage-playing."

The people left enraged, but came again next day, and for many days, but they had always to return empty-handed. In such cases where the money is refused, those who will not contribute invariably get into trouble. The collectors, aided by others, take such things as chairs, tables, etc., by force. Some of these things are used at the play, others are sold to make up for the money the owners have refused to give willingly. Day by day Mr. Lü and his wife were threatened by the collectors, who had gathered in great numbers, and when threats failed to achieve anything, their tormentors began to curse them, and declared they would beat them and soon teach them what it meant to turn from idols to a new religion. But the Lord kept His children calm and joyful in Himself, and they answered quietly:

"Very well, if you take our chairs and tables and break them to pieces, as you say you will, we cannot hinder you. And if you beat us, as you threaten to, we cannot help that either; but we are not going to give you any money for the play, as it is against our conscience and we will not sin against God."

Some of the persecutors still threatened, but others listened to the promptings of their better nature and gave up the quarrel. These, thoroughly ashamed of themselves, restrained the rest from going any further. Soon all of them scattered, and Mrs. Lü and her husband were left in peace, thanking God for the way in which He had undertaken for them.

The next year the people threatened them worse than ever, and then Mr. and Mrs. Lü, with some other Christians, almost lost heart. They began to look at the difficulties. They feared the storm that was threatening, and like Peter, as soon as they turned their eyes from the Lord and began to look around at the wind and waves, they lost faith, and were tempted to look to the missionaries for help. We told them, however, to cry to their Master. They did so, and soon realized that He was still the same as in His days on earth, that the hearts of men were in His hands, and that He turneth them according to His own will. At a word from Him the tempest ceased, and there was a great calm. The enemies, evidently restrained by the hand of God, did not even come to the house of His servants. The Lord was fighting for them, and they could afford to stand still and see His salvation.

CHAPTER XVII

LABOUR AND FRUIT

Mrs. Lü was faithful in using her opportunities for service, and not a few precious souls have found Christ through her. Some had been coming to the meetings before she had given up her vegetarian vow, and were still halting between two opinions. Mrs. Lü helped such to break through and fully decide for Christ. She did not believe in half measures. Others first heard the Gospel message from her lips, and were not able to resist the power with which she spoke. Amongst the latter was an old woman, called Mrs. Hsiao.

The first Sunday Mrs. Lü brought her to the meetings the writer happened to be at Kucheng. A collection was being taken for the Bible Society, and this old woman wanted to give thirty cash. We did not wish to receive it, fearing that she did not know what she was giving it for. But she pressed us to take it, and Mrs. Lü said, "Please, do take it. She understands quite well. Although she is at the services for the first time to-day she knows the Gospel already, for I have spoken to her several times, and she has quite made up her mind to serve the Lord. If you do not take it, she will be disappointed." And when Mrs. Hsiao herself was asked, she said she wanted to give the money so that others might hear the "Good News" Mrs. Lü had been telling her.

Mrs. Lü went on teaching her about Christ, and helped her to learn some hymns and to read a little. This latter work seemed a hopeless task, as Mrs. Hsiao was not young; moreover, she was half blind. When the writer saw her next time she had, however, mastered quite a few hymns. Patiently she was plodding on, using every spare minute, determined to learn as much as possible, but lamenting her own stupidity. Mrs. Lü showed herself a patient teacher, and it was touching to see how persevering they both were, never losing heart, even when the hymns were specially difficult, and one sentence had to be repeated over and over again before it had any meaning at all to the student. The catechism did not prove easier, but little by little some real progress was visible.

When Mrs. Hsiao had learned several hymns she longed to possess a hymn-book of her own. She asked if she might buy one and pay for it in instalments, as she could not afford to pay for it all at once. We gladly assented, and gave her the book. She made Mrs. Lü her treasurer, and whenever she had been able to save ten cash she brought them to her. About a month or two later she had paid the whole amount, and Mrs. Lü handed the money over to us. Gladly would we have given the book freely, but felt that Mrs. Hsiao would prize it more if it cost her a little, and at the same time it would afford us a better chance of seeing how far she was in earnest.

When the theatre collectors arrived that year at Mrs. Hsiao's house, they were met with a decided refusal. The time had been when she believed in their false gods, and rejoiced with them in the play they got up to honour their objects of worship, but it would never come again. She had changed Masters, and her desire was to have His favour. So she remained firm, even when the men threatened to take away the few things she possessed, which were indeed few enough, and most necessary for her daily use. That day the men left peacefully,

but came again after a day or two, determined to take some of her things if she refused to give the money. When they arrived she was in the guest-hall, and as soon as she saw them enter, she knelt where she was standing and cried to the Lord for help. In her fright she forgot she was in a public place and lost sight of her surroundings. She only realized that the test had come; they meant to take away the little she possessed, and so she cried simply and earnestly, but with intense fervour, that the Lord would undertake for her and show that He was mighty to deliver.

When the collectors saw her on her knees praying they got frightened, and said, "She is going to ask Heaven and her God to punish us. Let us go!" But some of them said they were not going to be fooled by an old woman and her God, so snatched the cooking-pan from the stove and went hastily out. When she had finished praying, Mrs. Hsiao found them all gone, but she was minus her cooking-pan. She was glad to have got off so easily, but even that one article was necessary to her. How could she do without it? She had no money to buy another. After a few moments' perplexity she made her way to Mrs. Lü's house, and told her story, and together they prayed that the missing article might be returned to her.

We heard about her difficulty, and one of the missionaries suggested that as the woman was so very poor we might give her a new cooking-pan. But some of us answered, "No, let her fight her own battle. It will be better for her, as it will strengthen her faith. Even if she does not get the article back (which we believe she will), it will only show her that we have to be willing to suffer for His sake." So we remained silent, that is, silent before men, but not before God. We prayed earnestly that the Lord, who understood how much this small test meant to the poor woman, still a babe in Christ, would restore unto her what she had lost, if it were for her good. And God did undertake for her. Day by day Mrs. Lü prayed with her, and expected the Lord to work for them. And He did not let them ask in vain. In His love He pitied His children, and in His power He touched the hearts of those who had made Mrs. Hsiao suffer, and soon the lost cooking-pan was restored, and the hearts of the two women overflowed in praise to God for His goodness and care.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRUIT MORE ABUNDANT

In a former chapter Mrs. Lü's brother was mentioned. Although he came off and on to the meetings, and gave up idol worship, he did not take his stand for Christ for a long time. Mr. Lü had tried earnestly to lead him into the way of salvation; and after Mrs. Lü had yielded to the Lord, she joined her husband in his efforts, and they soon had the joy of seeing him on the Lord's side.

A few months later he was married to a young woman who professed to be an earnest enquirer. That was the beginning of trial for him, for the woman had only been pretending to seek after God, as she knew he would not marry her unless she professed to be a Christian. She would have ruined him perhaps spiritually and financially, had not the Lord taken him to Himself. The year before he married he had been seriously ill, but had been healed in answer to prayer. Now the malady returned with redoubled force. It was a great trial to Mrs. Lü to see his suffering, for she loved her brother. Her heart was sad when he poured into her sympathetic ear the sorrow he felt in not being able to hinder his wife and her relatives having idolatrous performances for his recovery. He knew he was not going to recover; he longed to go home to the land beyond the shadows. From his wife he received no kind treatment. When almost at death's door he asked in the night for a cup of tea, but she refused to move from her bed. At last some neighbours, who heard his pitiful moan, got up and brought him the desired drink. He prayed that God might call him speedily, and his prayer was answered. Mr. and Mrs. Lü mourned for their brother, but could only thank God that He had been merciful enough to take him to Himself, for his sufferings in this world would have been prolonged.

Another one to whom Mrs. Lü was a great help was an old lady of eighty years, her father's step-mother. The old lady had been coming to the meetings since the first night we arrived at Kucheng, and was very intelligent and quick of understanding. There had not been much love lost between her and her granddaughter, but when her heart was touched, and the light of God began to shine in, things began to improve. Mrs. Lü had hitherto been patient with her, but out of duty only. But when she herself learned something of the compassionate love of Christ, there was an added tenderness in all her dealings with her grandmother. Her kind words and loving deeds did much toward hastening the day when the old lady stepped out into the light of God, and began to shine for Him. For

several years she bore a bright testimony to His redeeming grace, and each Sunday was a real feast day to her. Even when on her sick-bed, her heart was with the loved ones gathered around the Word of God, and she prayed for His blessing upon them. On her last Sunday morning on earth she asked, "Who is coming to preach to-day?" They told her, and she nodded, satisfied. That day she was gathered to the multitude of worshippers around the Throne in Heaven. What a trophy of God's grace! Her life had been a hard one. For many years she had toiled and laboured; sorrow had not been lacking, and all those weary years she had served and feared the powers of darkness. But Christ had set her free, and at eventide there was light and peace.

Soon after their conversion Mrs. Lü and her husband were much concerned about the parents of their little daughter-in-law. The latter came into their home the day we opened the chapel at Kucheng, and was from that day brought under the influence of the Gospel, as she was allowed to come and go as she liked. She was bright and affectionate, and soon learned to read. Unlike many girls who come to their mother-in-law's home while they are still children, she was treated with great tenderness and consideration, and her heart soon warmed towards Mr. and Mrs. Lü. But although she was won, that was only a small step, and greater difficulties had to be overcome. The girl's parents were entirely heathen, and clung to their beliefs and customs with great zeal. They had no interest whatever in the Gospel, nor had they any sympathy with those who believed it.

The first difficulty started when the girl became ill, soon after Mr. Lü had decided for Christ. His wife was not yet converted. The parents came, and demanded that the Taoist priests should be called in to perform their rites for the recovery of the girl. Mr. Lü told them he was now a believer in God, and could not allow anything idolatrous in his house. He would spend all the money that was needed in doctors and medicine, but could not sin against God. The parents of the girl were angry, but it was of no use—Mr. Lü remained firm. After a long time of argument on both sides, the parents said they would take their daughter home with them and do all they could for her, but Mr. Lü refused to have anything to do with their practices, and would not bear the expenses either. The girl did not want the Taoists. She had lost all faith in the idols, and was learning to pray to the living God and to trust Christ; but she was still a child, and too young to stand out against her parents. Her illness was not serious, and she soon recovered.

But when Mr. and Mrs. Lü were both on the Lord's side, they were very much

exercised in their minds about the future arrangements concerning this girl. She was ailing again, and the parents began afresh to trouble them. Mr. and Mrs. Lü felt that, according to the law of the land, she now belonged to them, and they had the responsibility for her. The girl, too, loved the Lord, and objected to have anything idolatrous done for her. Yet, what were they to do? It was not a cheery outlook to think that every time the young girl was not well they should have to quarrel with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wen. They were peace-loving, and dreaded any disagreement and strife between themselves and their relations; and yet such seemed unavoidable.

It was at this point that the Lord showed them a way out of the difficulty, and reminded Mrs. Lü of the power of prayer. So she turned to her husband and said, "We cannot sin against God by calling in the Taoist priest; we cannot allow anything in our house which would be dishonouring to the name of our Lord and Master; but He has showed me that there is one thing we can do—we can pray; and we will pray, that the Lord may open the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Wen, and lead them to Himself. If they are led to repentance—and why should they not be?—all the difficulties will be at an end."

With a steadfast purpose, therefore, these two servants of God set themselves to pray for those who were on their hearts. And the God of Israel heard the cry of His chosen ones, and soon His Spirit was at work in the heart of the mother of the girl. Sooner than they had dared to hope, Mr. and Mrs. Lü rejoiced in the answer to their prayers, and could praise God for His wonder-working power. Mrs. Wen opened her heart to the call of the Spirit; she began to enquire after God, and very quickly, through the instrumentality of Mrs. Lü, she was brought into the light.

From the first it was evident that the Lord Himself had touched her heart. She sought salvation most earnestly, and her former indifference gave place to an intense longing after God. When once she had started out, there was no turning back, and nothing was allowed to hinder her in the race. She seemed to have imbibed something of Mrs. Lü's earnestness, and was altogether changed under the new influence that had come into her life. She became bright and energetic, and with a will set herself to learn as much as possible. She bought a hymn-book and catechism, and began to read, Mrs. Lü being her teacher. Through storm or rain, cold or heat she would tramp to the services; nothing could keep her at home. It did one good to see her appear with her bright smile, which had almost become part of her since she had learned where true happiness was to be found.

Now and again her family would say, "We are so busy, you might stay at home for once." "No," she answered, "I will not stay at home, but I will get up early in the morning and prepare all I can for you before I leave." And she had her way.

In the beginning her husband laughed her to scorn, sometimes he scolded her and called her a fool. But very soon he had to acknowledge that Christianity was no mere fancy, but a reality, and he could not but admire his wife's earnestness. So he left her in peace, and did not allow the sons to trouble her. After a while he began to take an interest in the daily prayers to God, and would try to help her, in securing for her all the quietness and comfort possible. That made home life pleasanter and easier for her, and she praised God for this token of His grace and favour.

How Mrs. Lü rejoiced, and what a bond there was between the two relatives! They were one in the Saviour whom they loved, and both were filled with the one desire to please Him. Mrs. Lü had to share in the new-found joy of the one she had been leading to Christ, and every one who has been used in winning souls for the Master knows the blessedness of such hours; an abundant reward indeed for prayers and labours.

Advice and teaching had still to be given, and Mrs. Lü not only began a good work, but tried to carry it on to the best of her ability—to help the new believers by counsel and intercession, and to strengthen their hands in the Lord. And the one who had so recently passed from death unto life was not idle either. Especially in her own home she began to witness for Christ, and found a willing listener in the wife of her second son. This young woman gladly accompanied her mother-in-law to the meetings and heard the Word with joy. Her father, who heard of her attending Christian services, was furious, and declared he would disown her and bring severe punishment upon her and her home if she continued to go to the meetings. He insisted on her husband forbidding her to go. So with a heavy heart the young woman had to stay at home. She knew how hard and cruel and unforgiving her father was, and she dared not disobey him. But she determined to continue in the worship of God, for even her father could not hinder her in that. She asked her mother-in-law to buy her a book so that she might go on learning at home. She never dared to brave her father's anger, and step right out for Christ, but she never worshipped idols again, and when she had a very serious illness, she trusted the Lord for healing instead of turning to the Taoist priest. She only lived for a few years, but her mother-in-law had the full assurance that she died trusting in Christ Jesus and His redeeming Love.

After a while old Mr. Wen started coming to the meeting, and his wife was full of joy. But trouble arose in the home, and their eldest son had to suffer through an unrighteous law case. He wanted us to interfere on his behalf, which we could not do, so Mr. Wen and his sons turned away from us in anger for a time, and Mrs. Wen had a hard test in her home. But she and Mrs. Lü, and some of us, prayed through, and Mr. Wen soon saw that he had been too hasty in his judgment, and came back. From that time he went steadily on, and husband and wife were once more walking together on the same road, but this time it was leading them upward into light and glory.

For Mr. Wen the journey was soon ended. Even before he had been baptized and had his name put on the Church roll, he heard the roll-call from above, and gladly answered. Mrs. Wen pursued her lonely way, faithful to the last. She, too, has left for the Home with the many mansions. A short serious illness brought her suddenly to the brink of the river, but there was no fear in her heart as she had to ford that stream. She gave her last bright testimony to the saving power of Christ, and told her loved ones that she was going to be with Him, and they were not to be anxious about her future after death, for she was going to the home of eternal blessedness. For the last day or two she was more or less unconscious, but always at peace. She had lived and walked with Christ, and He carried her gently through the chilling waters to the other shore.

Mrs. Wen will be one of the jewels that will shine brightly in Mrs. Lü's crown, when she receives her reward from the hand of her Master. May none who read this be found starless or empty-handed in that day!

CHAPTER XIX

PREPARATION FOR FURTHER SERVICE

We must go back again to the time when Mrs. Lü had her heart's desire in seeing Mrs. Wen beginning to seek after God. In the midst of that joy the testing time began, and the Lord brought His child through deep waters. For days and weeks she was lying on her sick-bed, with, humanly speaking, no hope of recovery. These weeks were hard and trying, especially to her loved ones, who

watched her anxiously. The native doctors had given up the case as beyond their ability, and said there was nothing more to be done; Mrs. Lü would never get well again. Many friends crowded around and entreated her to make her peace with the gods she had offended, and to let some Taoist ceremonies be performed for her, as that was her only hope of restoration to health.

She, of course, would not hear of it, and to one and all testified to the joy and peace she had in God. "Do not worry about me," she said brightly, "I am not afraid to die. I rather long for death, for I shall then be at home with Jesus, which is far better." Weak as she was, she used every opportunity for pointing the unsaved ones to Christ. When asked if she did not feel anxious about leaving her husband, and the children who were still young, she replied, "The Lord will take care of them." She was anxious about nothing, but was longing for her heavenly home, although she said she would be glad to serve the Lord a little longer, if He wanted her here.

Many went away wondering what the treasure was that she possessed, which they knew nothing about. A wonderful treasure it must be, they reflected, to keep her so calm and peaceful, yes, even rejoicing in the face of death. But others insisted that the gods were punishing Mrs. Lü for having left them; and as she would not take their advice and try to reconcile the idols, they were furious and loud in their denunciations of her. One of Mrs. Lü's relatives came to her and said:

"I am so frightened for you, all the people are cursing you. They declare you are now reaping your punishment for leaving the idols."

Mrs. Lü only smiled and answered, "Let them curse, they can do me no harm, neither they nor their gods of clay, for my God does bless me."

"But they say, you will surely die."

"Even if I should die, there is no punishment. I shall be most glad to go to my Saviour, and I have nothing to be afraid of. I shall only have the greater happiness and glory."

It need scarcely be said that we pleaded earnestly and constantly with God to spare Mrs. Lü's life, if it would be His will, as we felt that she was so much needed for the work at Kucheng. He graciously heard and answered prayer, and Mrs. Lü began to take a turn for the better. Slowly, very slowly the improvement

showed itself. She would insist on being carried to the services every Sunday, her husband fetching her from her bed, and seating her in a chair in the little chapel, which had become a sacred spot to her. There she would sit with closed eyes, listening to the service. She could not read or sing, as she had no strength to open her eyes even, but she said softly, "I can pray." At the close of the service she was carried back to bed again, entirely exhausted. But God, who knew her motives and saw the longings of a heart full of love to Him, kept her from taking any harm through what might otherwise have been considered very unwise.

What a joy it was to see her well! She had only gained, and not lost, in her spiritual life during the time the Lord had laid her aside. She had been chastened through her pain and suffering, through the temptations from without and within, and would be more meet for the Master's use than formerly. And so her later service proved. Often when she went out shopping, or when any other business took her to the street of the village, she would get an opportunity of witnessing for her Lord. The shopkeepers and their wives would say, "Now, sit down and tell us something of the Jesus doctrine first, and then we will serve you." To that she gladly assented, and with pleasant manner and convincing words, she would tell of the love of Christ, and what it had done for her. It often happened that others came to listen to the message; indeed, many went to her home for that very purpose, and to each and all she related the story of her conversion, giving God all the glory for having conquered when she had determined never to yield. She told them of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power, and of the great privilege of being a child of God. Mrs. Lü did not get discouraged when they did not believe at once. "I do not wonder you do not believe," she would say, "I was just the same once, and worse than you. No power on earth could have made me leave my old way; but the wonder-working power of God did it, and that same power will still bring you into His fold."

Many strong opponents of the Gospel, many full of arguments and worldly wisdom sought her out to argue and reason with her, fully assured that their clever and witty speeches would soon bring ridicule and shame upon her and her belief. But quietly and earnestly she silenced all of them, often even outwitting them in arguments; at other times just telling her simple story, but with such power that all mouths were closed. The Lord indeed gave her "mouth and wisdom" according to His promise in Luke xxi. 15, and very often, when the husband and wife were telling their experiences, the former would say, with a proud, fond look at his wife, "They are never able to get the best of her in argument. The Lord always helps her to overcome them all." How he loved her,

and how united these two were in heart and mind! Day by day, as they both followed Christ, they were drawn closer to each other.

Mrs. Lü was always ready for service, and whenever the Lord called her to do something for Him, she did it joyfully and with all her might. When some days had been set apart for the worship of a famous idol visiting Kucheng, the people, especially the women, streamed together from all quarters. A good many of them were strangers in the place, and all sights worthy of notice had to be seen. The "Jesus Hall" was one of them, perhaps the most important of all, for the women had heard strange tales of the foreigners with their new doctrine, and they wanted to see the place with their own eyes.

Mrs. Lü saw them coming, and realized that here was work for her to do, as the old chapel-keeper was little good at preaching. That morning Mrs. Lü had read in her daily text-book: "Be of good cheer. Speak, and be not silent, for I have much people in this city." Now the message came back to her, and it seemed to be the voice of God Himself, so she answered joyfully, "Very well, Lord, if Thou dost want me to preach, I will preach. I will put down my own work, and only work for Thee during these days." So without delay or regret, she put everything else aside, and for three or four days witnessed from morning till night to all the women who came, so that each one might hear the glad tidings of salvation before returning to a distant home. Could such faithful work, done through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and through the constraining love of Christ, be in vain?

She would say in her own bright way—"I am glad and willing to work for the Lord, even if it should mean great loss; but the Lord does not let me lose anything, not even in worldly things. I give my time to Him, and He so often helps me to do a piece of work that makes up for all the time I have given. Do you know what happened last week? I gave my time to preaching the Gospel during the week, and then on Saturday somebody brought a pair of shoes to be mended. It was a difficult piece of work, and few were able to do it. I undertook to mend them, and in that one day I earned 100 cash, when others were only able to earn 20 or 30 cash a day."

Does not this story give a striking example of how God rewards glad and willing service for Him, even here, in addition to the greater recompense above? "Therefore be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

CHAPTER XX

DAYS OF SHADOW

Reference has already been made to the death of Mrs. Lü's brother. This had been a great trial to her, as he was the only one left who bound her to the home of her girlhood. It was in June 1904 that he left them for the better world above, and already in July death called another one from the immediate circle. This time it was the old tailor Chang who was summoned into the presence of the King.

He was, indeed, a brand plucked from the burning. He had been pretty well off, and was a good tailor. When a child, Mr. Lü had been apprenticed to Chang by his parents. Chang was fond of the quiet, conscientious boy, and treated him well, and the two grew fond of each other. But soon their ways parted, and later on Chang sunk very low on account of his opium-smoking habit. He kept an opium den, lived with a woman who was not his wife, and became more and more a slave to opium, until he had wasted his last dollar and sold all he possessed. It was then, when he was landed in utter misery, and knowing not where to turn, that his former apprentice, Mr. Lü, came forward, and offered him a home and shelter.

Chang's body was ruined through former sins, and when trying to diminish his daily supply of opium, he suffered acutely, and was often ill for weeks together. It was during one of these attacks that the Lü children told him to pray to God for healing. He did so, as he said he could not withstand the pleading of the children, although he had been very displeased with Mr. and Mrs. Lü being Christians. The Lord did raise him up the next day. Chang realized it was an answer to prayer, and set himself to seek the Lord. Little by little he was led on to know the true way of salvation, and decided to serve Christ. Having taken the first step along the narrow way, he went steadily on and never wavered in his decision. It was touching to see his earnestness in worship and prayer, and in listening to the Word. He left off smoking opium, and was only swallowing one small pill a day as medicine. He tried hard to reduce even that small pill, and several times decided to do without any opium, but he got so ill that he had to take the pill again.

In the spring of 1904 he tried again to do without opium altogether, and we gave him some anti-opium medicine, but he could not take it. His poor body was altogether ruined. Soon he had to keep to his bed, and Mrs. Lü looked after him as if he were her own father. The old man loved her, and could not bear her out of his sight. The children, too, cheered him greatly, as they would come to his bedside and talk to him about God, and sing their hymns to him. During his illness he drew nearer and nearer to the Lord, and was constantly in prayer. Often during the day, and especially during the long sleepless nights, his voice could be heard in praise and prayer. For the last few days he refused to take even the smallest pill of opium. They told him that it was only as medicine he needed it, for he could not take any food; but the old man firmly resisted, saying, "I will go to meet my God altogether free from opium, and from any other of my former sins. The blood of Christ has cleansed me, I will not defile myself any more." Although suffering all the time, he awaited his end joyfully, and continually repeated to those around him that he was trusting in the merit of the Crucified.

One day shortly before his death an old vegetarian leader came to call upon Mrs. Lü. His chief motive was to point out to her that all the sickness, sorrow, and trials, and the deaths of some of her family had come to her as a result of her breaking her vegetarian vow. He finished up by saying, "You see how wrong you were. Your God does not care for you, He only sends you trouble." Mrs. Lü felt tired and weary that day, and being downhearted did not answer so quickly and brightly as was her wont.

Old Chang, lying on his death-bed in the next room, could hear all, and noticed not only the man's cruelty, but Mrs. Lü's depression. Feeble as he was he managed to get out of bed, and stumbled into the room, to the great distress of Mrs. Lü. She knew he had not walked a step for days, and was afraid he might fall, so prepared to help him back again. But he took no notice of her, and confronting the vegetarian, said, "No, she is not wrong; you are wrong, our God is worthy of our trust. He does care for us, He does love us, and the trials are only for a short while." He asked for a New Testament, and began looking for a text. His eyes were dim, and he wanted to put on his glasses, but had not the strength to do so, and his fingers were almost unable to turn the pages of the book. Mrs. Lü remonstrated, telling him that he was ill, dying, and must go back to bed. But he heeded her not, he must show the vegetarian in black and white on Whom their hope was built. At last he found what he wanted. His trembling fingers pointed to the Word, and in a weak, but glad voice, he read out—"Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." His

eagerness and earnestness, even when at the very door of death, made a great impression on all around, and the vegetarian leader took his departure. A few days later old Chang was called Home. He was never enrolled on the Church register, but no one ever doubted that his name was registered in the Book of Life. His faith kept firm to the last, and he gave instructions that no heathen rites were to be performed for him. He said, "I am going straight to my Saviour. I do not need any Taoist priest to break open the door of hell, or to bridge the gulf, for the door of heaven is opened wide for me through Jesus and His blood."

Mr. Lü bought a coffin for him, and his own relatives were to take the coffin to the home of the old man, three miles out in the country. The relatives came, but not to do their duty, only to make trouble. They declared the Lü family must have received a lot of money from old Chang, and demanded it back. They refused to bury their relative, so Mr. Lü calmly called others to bury him, and paid all the extra expenses. Then the shop-keepers at Kucheng got enraged, and made the relatives ashamed of their behaviour, for they knew in their hearts, and all others knew, that Mr. and Mrs. Lü had pitied the old man in his poverty and sickness, when his own people had spurned him.

Again the Lord had been glorified through His servants, and although they did not receive much gratitude here for many of their loving deeds, they will not lose the reward laid up for them in the Father's Home.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SHADOW DEEPENS

So far reference has only been made to the trials connected with the illness and death of two in the family circle. But another storm was already pending, and a great dark cloud was yet to break over the heads of these two devoted servants of God. Did the Lord not have compassion on them, or had He ceased to care? Why did they not prosper in everything as before? Had the Lord changed in His love for them, or had He forgotten to be gracious? They did not think so, neither did they murmur. They were ready to take what He sent, and could say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." They knew

they could trust Him; and their faith was kept firm and bright, and the presence of their Heavenly Guide grew more precious as He led them through the valley of shadows.

Mr. Lü had not been strong for years, and every now and again, specially during the winter and spring, he had a bad cough, with some slight haemorrhage. As he got better as soon as the warm weather set in, they had not considered the attacks dangerous, and Mr. Lü would work as hard as ever, often doing night work by the dim light from the Chinese oil-lamp. On Saturday they would all come to the prayer meeting, and then go back home and work till long after their regular bedtime, so that they might be free for the Sunday. Mr. Lü was a very hard worker, and never spared himself.

In the beginning of 1905 he took a more severe cold than before; his cough became very troublesome, and he was constantly spitting blood. He believed everything was owing to the exceptionally cold winter we were experiencing, and hoped to be better as soon as the spring set in. But before spring came, he gave every evidence of serious consumption. Knowing that he had been ailing for years, it was hoped that he might possibly improve again, and perhaps live on for some time. He was therefore invited to come to the city Mission Station for a while, so that he might get proper medicine and better nourishment than he could have in his own home. As soon as his strength allowed him to take the journey, he came and stayed with us for a month. During that time all was done that love could do. At the end of the month he felt better and seemed stronger, but soon after his return home he began to get worse again, and his cough grew more violent. Soon it was evident to all that there was no hope of his recovery, but he and his wife were the only ones who remained calm about it. Many doctors came to ask if they could do anything for him; some out of kindness, others to enrich their own pockets. But Mr. Lü only replied, "No, you are not able to do anything for me. I am going Home. The Lord is calling me."

His wife was blamed by everybody for "letting him die," as they put it.

"Why don't you try to save him? The Taoist priests would restore him to health. Why do you not call them?"

"Because," she replied, "what you and the priests trust in, is all false and powerless. Life and death are alike in the hand of God, and He will do what is best."

The people shook their heads at her obstinacy; others declaring it served her right. Her husband's death would be at her door, for had she not angered the idols in leaving them? Mrs. Lü heeded them not, for her heart was fixed. The Rock upon which she had built was the Rock of Ages, and upon it she stood secure, firm and unshaken in the time of trial. She knew whom she had believed, had proved His faithfulness, and that He would remain though all else were taken from her.

Mr. Lü, though glad for his own sake to go to the Home above, would at times feel sorry for his much-loved wife and son, and would express his regret at leaving them while the boy was still so young. But Mrs. Lü, instead of complaining or murmuring against her fate, as others would have done, gently encouraged her husband in the Lord, saying, "Never mind about us. You just prepare yourself to meet your God. We have Him, and He will take care of us. Do not worry." With words like these she would comfort his heart, although her own was bleeding. But she knew where to take her sorrow, and every day, and many times a day, she fled to her safe and happy refuge.

When Mr. Lü was staying in the city and she was left alone, her heart often went out in longing after him, and she was wondering anxiously how he was. She felt lonely without him, and, try as hard as she might be to cheerful, sad thoughts would come. Just then one of the evangelists went to Kucheng to take the Sunday services. He was led to speak on John xiv. 1—"Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me." That was the message Mrs. Lü needed. She felt comforted, and, after the meeting, she started to read the whole chapter. What treasures it revealed, and how precious it became to her. She heard, while reading it over and over again, the voice of Him who first spoke these words to His beloved disciples, and that voice had lost none of its former power. Eagerly and joyfully she drank in the beautiful words and precious promises, spoken to those other sad ones when the loving Master was about to leave them, and in her quiet room her heart was filled with "the peace that passeth all understanding." Needless to say, John xiv. became her favourite chapter henceforth.

When the writer went to see Mr. Lü for the last time, we arrived late one Friday night. He sat up joyfully when he heard our voice, and greeted us with the words—"Our next meeting-place will be in Heaven." It did not need more than one look at the wasted form to realize that for him, at least, that happy place would soon be reached. It was with a sad and husky voice we replied, "Yes, Mr.

Lü, it will be with our Lord in Glory." The native evangelist who had accompanied us now entered the room, and after some talk we had prayer together. Although our hearts ached and the tears could not be kept back, we were filled with praise to God for His saving grace, for the hope of glory, and for the eternal inheritance laid up in heaven. Oh, how near Heaven seemed! Christ was in our midst, and the humble room seemed hallowed by His presence. Having commended our brother to our Father's tender care, we separated for the night.

The following day he was much the same. In the evening the prayer meeting was held in his house, as we had a message from the Lord we wanted to deliver to him and his wife. He insisted on being helped out into the public room, and remained there while the meeting lasted, which was consequently shortened. It was a blessed hour we spent together in communion with the Lord, and in hearing His voice speaking through Psalm xxiii.

The following day, Sunday, the meetings were held in the chapel, so Mr. Lü could not be present. But he was present in spirit, and during the prayer meeting his heart was lifted up to God in his lonely chamber. In the evening the little praise meeting was held at their home, and we shall never forget the picture that met our eyes as we entered. Mr. Lü was lying on a low couch, his wife sitting close beside him, holding his hand. Their little son was sitting close to both of them at the end of the bed, leaning against his mother, and gently stroking his father's feet. It was the most touching and home-like thing we had ever seen in family life in China. But, if the shadows rested over that united and loving home, the Sun of Righteousness was shining also.

Everybody seemed to choose bright hymns about the Heavenly Home and the coming again of our Lord in glory. Mr. Lü was lying there with a happy smile on his face, and the last hymn he asked for was "Oh, thou my soul, bless God the Lord." As we sang our praise to God our souls were lifted above the sufferings and trials of this life, and seemed to realize already something of the glory which was to be revealed. One of our fellow-workers had sent a card for Mr. and Mrs. Lü with Romans viii. 28 on it, and as we read it, it seemed as if we already saw beyond the veil, beyond the "workings" to the blessed result—"The joy unspeakable and full of glory." Mrs. Lü said after a while, "The longer I sing, the happier I get. My sorrow has quite departed, and is no more." Oh, how little does the world know what real joy means! What are all the pleasures this world can offer, yea, even the choicest ones, compared to one hour's real joy in fellowship

and communion with Him who is the Fount of every Blessing, and in whose presence there is fulness of joy? Would that the poor souls hungering for rest and happiness, dissatisfied with the worldly pleasures, tired of their empty show, might turn to Him who is the source of all true and lasting joy. How abundantly they would be satisfied with the fatness of His house, for He would make them drink of the rivers of His pleasure. How much richer their lives would be already here, to say nothing of the life hereafter.

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
Other joys are but a name,
But His love abideth ever,
To eternal years the same.
Oh, the height and depth of mercy,
Oh, the length and breadth of love,
Oh, the fulness of salvation,
Pledge of endless life above.

CHAPTER XXII

ENTERING THE VALLEY

The following morning there seemed to be a change in Mr. Lü, and thinking that the end would come that day we stayed on until the afternoon, for which he was very grateful. Several times he would say, "I know quite well why you are staying here, it is only for my sake. I shall never be able to repay you for what you have done for me, but God will." And yet it seemed so little that one had been able to do for him, and he had been such a help to us, and to the work in Kucheng. Towards evening we had to return to the city; so after a parting prayer and a last farewell, or, rather, a hopeful "We shall meet again up yonder," we left him smiling his bright farewell. The evangelist remained with them till the end should come.

Mr. Lü lingered on till Thursday night. During those days many came to see him, and expressed their regret and pity at his not getting better. But he answered brightly, "No, I am not sorry that the end is near. Although I am loth to leave my family, I am still full of joy. There is no fear of death in my heart, I am prepared for it, and I know my Saviour is coming to take me to my Heavenly Home, to be with Him, which is far better. What about you? Take heed and prepare quickly for the day when you, too, may be called." With these words and many others, he would testify to the joy he had in Christ, and exhort his neighbours and friends to seek salvation before it was too late.

The day before his death he had a visit from a Christian distantly related to him. He greeted him brightly, and said, "Jesus has not yet come. I wish He would come quickly and take me Home. Our teacher left the evangelist here to help us, and I know she has other work for him to do." Up till the very end his thoughts were for others and not for himself.

Towards midnight he called for his wife. "Please wash me quickly and put my old garments aside, and help me into my new clothes, for I am soon going: the Lord is calling me."

"Do not say this," she remonstrated.

But he answered, "Do not hinder me, do not try to delay me. My time has

come, my God is calling me."

So she did as he bid her, and prepared him for the journey. Some days previously he had asked her to make him a long white robe, as it was in pure white, within and without, that he wanted to meet his Lord. When their preparations were ready, his wife wanted to call the evangelist, but even then Mr. Lü was thoughtful enough to say, "No, do not wake him; he is getting old, let him sleep. I am all right and need nothing." He was called, however, and soon stood at the bedside of his friend, praying for him for the last time. Before that prayer was ended, Mr. Lü called out, "I am going, Jesus is here," and with that word upon his lips his spirit had left the mortal body and taken its flight to God who gave it. There was no pain, no sorrow, no last struggle. Gently and peacefully he passed over Jordan into the presence of the King.

The funeral took place a week later. Our hearts were sore and the tears flowing fast as we remembered we should see his face no more. In some measure we could sympathize with those who were nearest and dearest to him, and who had lost so much. But through the whole service a joy note rang out clearly. We felt the very presence of the Lord, and even all the outsiders were awed and listened attentively to the message given, in which the evangelist sought to bring home to their hearts the necessity for receiving Christ and His redeeming grace, so that their end might be like the one they had so recently witnessed. Many of them never forgot the peace that kept Mr. Lü's heart at perfect rest, even when he stood on the brink of the river. His joy in the Lord under such circumstances was a surprise and a mystery which would again and again force itself upon their minds. They asked each other, and they asked us, where that joy came from.

On the morning of the burial, a heathen man came and told us that he had seen Mr. Lü in his dream the night before. He was walking on a beautiful shore which must be Heaven, and was so joyful and beautiful. Mr. Lü had called to him, begging him to come across, and he decided to go to that glorious place. When starting to go he felt some change come over him, and at last reached the glory-land where he conversed with Mr. Lü. This was his dream; but was it not a clear call to that man to seek the things above? God grant that he may heed the call.

In other ways, too, the Lord spoke to some of the ignorant, idolatrous people around. He knew just the state of their minds, and what would appeal to those

who as yet had no light. In His tender mercy He sought their lost souls, and spoke to them in a language they could understand. Some of them said to one another, "Well, it is strange, the God of the Christians does seem to care for them. They refuse to choose days like we do, and yet every Christian has died on a lucky day. We can choose our days for the funerals, but we cannot choose lucky days for those dying. But God does that for those who worship Him."

Poor benighted souls. They do not know that to the God of the Christians all days are alike, but in His love He teaches them according to their understanding. How great is His long-suffering! It was a great help to me to see how the Lord did not despise their ignorance, but fitted His voice and doings to their understanding. While we should have got impatient, God took the trouble of teaching them in this small way. What a good thing it is that our Father is more patient than we His children are. We want light and full understanding straight off; but He does not despise the very smallest beginning, does not reject the poor soul in darkness, who shows, perhaps, only a feeble groping after the light. May He make us more like Himself!

It is true that the "tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." While Mr. Lü was lying on his death-bed, one of the idols was having its birthday celebrated, and again the people of the place were collecting money for the theatre. Mrs. Lü replied again that she would be glad to give her share for anything which would benefit her fellow-men, and was even willing to give a double share, but could not give them any money for idolatry. The men threatened that she should ask them in vain for help when her husband died. They would not carry the coffin, neither would they lend her the things needed for carrying it to its resting-place. She did not reply, but came and told us. We advised her to act as if no word had been said, for we believed the men would think better of it, and not carry out their threats. And if they did, the Church members from other villages would gladly do that service for her. So she said nothing till after her husband's death, when all of them came without any refusal. Only one man said that he would not carry a Christian's coffin, but the others soon made him ashamed of himself. None could keep up his displeasure with Mrs. Lü for very long, for she was too much respected by all.

As the funeral procession passed through Kucheng the streets were lined on both sides with onlookers. But even there a hush seemed to have fallen on the

people. Here and there a quiet remark was heard, "Oh, the Christians do pay proper respect to their dead. Even all the missionaries and preachers follow them to the grave, and wear mourning for them!" Some little boys were walking ahead of the coffin, beating the gongs and carrying four banners, with the inscription, "He shall certainly rise again," and, "He shall ascend to heaven and dwell there." One long banner showed the text, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men." And another, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." One boy carried a large white umbrella, then followed the coffin, carried by eight men, behind which the wife and nearest relatives went weeping and wailing, recalling all the virtues of the one who had gone from them. Further behind, other relatives and friends followed, ourselves among the number, all with white headgear.

The remains of Mr. Lü were put to rest on the quiet hillside, beside his first wife. Before he died, we had chosen the words for his gravestone—"He that believeth in Me, though he die, yet shall he live," and also the word of the Apostle Paul, "For ever with the Lord." Yes, for ever with the Lord, separated from us for a little while, but not for ever. Here the short time of warfare apart, there the long eternity of victory and blessedness together. What a glorious hope is ours!

God's ways are wonderful, and His thoughts past finding out. To our finite minds, Mr. Lü seemed needed here. The Lord had put him in a place where he had many opportunities for service, and those opportunities were not left unheeded or misused. "Oh, that he might be spared to us!" that was the cry in the beginning, but already we began to see the purpose of God in taking His servant away, as so much was accomplished through his death. God, our God, does not make any mistakes. He buries His servants but carries on His work. May it be said at the end of the life of each one of us, as I think it might truly be written over Mr. Lü's service—"He has done what he could!"

CHAPTER XXIII

ANOTHER JEWEL WON FOR CHRIST

"Old Grandfather, you are early this morning at your worship." Thus Mrs. Lü addressed an old man who was earnestly worshipping at a shrine she was passing. Her heart went out in compassion for the old man, who was nearing the end of life's journey without God and without hope. So she addressed him kindly, hoping she would be able to point him to Christ. The old man was hard of hearing. After having finished his worship, he slowly turned round and looked at her, and again she repeated her greeting. "You are early at your worship, old Grandfather. You are very earnest about it."

"Well may I be in earnest," he replied, "for herein my only hope lies. I am an old man, without kith or kin, without anybody to care for my soul when I die."

"But you are wasting your money on worshipping these false gods, and you are spending your energy in vain. I know of a better way."

"A better way! What might that be? I never heard of any better way. And as I have no sons or grandsons, I must look out for myself. I do not need my money. I have buried my wife and my children. Now I have been preparing for my own burial. For twelve years my grave has been made and is well lined with bricks. My coffin is in my house waiting for me. I have prepared many boxes full of paper clothes, and many thousand paper dollars to be burned for me when I am gone, for I do not want to go hungry and naked into the next world."

Another jewel for Christ. "You are early at your worship, old grandfather. You are very earnest about it."

[Illustration: Another jewel for Christ.]

"You are early at your worship, old grandfather. You are very earnest about it."

"But all these things will be of no use to you in the next world. The priests are deceiving you. You ought to come and worship God."

"You say I ought to worship God. I do worship heaven. We all ought to worship heaven and earth."

"I do not want you to worship heaven, but the Creator of heaven and earth. There is no God beside Him."

"But I have not seen Him. I do not know Him."

"No, you cannot see Him, for He is a Spirit; but He sees you, and He supplies your need every day by sending the rain and sunshine when needed. And better still, He will forgive your sins. He is the only one who can forgive sins."

"The only way to get your sins forgiven is to do good deeds, and accumulate as much merit as possible."

"That way, too, is false. You know I was a vegetarian for many years."

"Yes, I remember you when you lived in my native village, in my relatives' home, and when your first husband was ill. Ah, you were a strict vegetarian then!"

"That is true, but God taught me the better way, and now I am serving Him. There is no need for me to lay up merit for myself, for I trust in the atoning Blood of Christ and stand upon His merit. Indeed, I have merited only condemnation, but God in His infinite grace has forgiven all."

"The doctrine you preach is good, and it is quite true, but I am too old to obtain such happiness as you speak of."

"No, you are not too old—the Lord Jesus wants you to come to Him. And the older you are the more important it is for you to believe quickly, so that you may escape the sufferings in the next world."

"I should like to do that, but I do not understand. What am I to do?"

"If you will come to see me in my own home, I will tell you more about Jesus and His teaching."

With that invitation, Mrs. Lü left the old man, but she began to pray for him and for his salvation. She realized that it would not be easy for his darkened mind to understand the good news she had been telling him, and yet she felt that he would be saved. A few days later, old Grandfather Hsü appeared in her home. He had been thinking about the strange doctrine, and wanted to know more.

Gladly Mrs. Lü explained the way of salvation to him, and pointed him to the Crucified and Risen Saviour.

The next Sunday he came to the services, and it did not take him long to find out that he had at last come upon that which would satisfy his heart, and for which he had been longing in vain for many years. The old man, who had been bowing down to wood and stone for eighty years, was brought into touch with the Living God, who soon became a bright reality to him. He who had done his utmost to prepare himself for the world to come, learned to rejoice in the eternal inheritance laid up for him in heaven. His faith was so simple that it gave no room for doubt or reasoning. Like a child who, weary with chasing the shadows, nestles down to rest in his mother's arms, so old Grandfather Hsü turned from his weary search and vain strivings after peace, and pillowed his head on the loving breast of his Saviour, and there his heart found rest.

A year later he was baptized, being then eighty-one years old. How our hearts rejoiced when we looked upon his shining face and listened to his bright testimony. Some months before his baptism we asked him, "Grandfather Hsü, what about your boxes of clothes and all your paper money?"

"Oh, these false things are burnt. I fetched them down from the loft and made a bonfire of them."

"Were you not sorry to see them burnt, seeing that you had prepared them so carefully, and had spent a lot of money on them?"

"Oh no, I do not need them now, for Jesus has prepared all for me. When I die there is nothing left for others to do but to lower the coffin already prepared, and complete the grave. Some one will do that for me. My heart is at peace. I have nothing to be anxious about, but am just quietly waiting till the Lord Jesus calls me Home."

And so he kept on waiting till he was eighty-three years old, without a shadow of doubt darkening his simple, child-like faith in the Lord. One Sunday he gathered as usual with the Lord's people at the little chapel at Kucheng, and only bade them good-bye after the afternoon meeting. No one thought that Grandfather Hsü had been amongst them for the last time in this world. The next morning he was found dead in his bed, with a happy smile on his face. Evidently there had been no pain. Death had been a messenger from God, calling him

Home, and not the "king of terrors." Could the Lord have dealt more kindly with the old man, who would have had none to lovingly care for him had he passed through a long illness? Quickly and gently he had been lifted up into the Everlasting Arms. There was joy in Heaven, for another priceless and precious jewel had been brought into the King's Treasure Chamber. "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels."

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

Mrs. Lü is still living and working for God. But her name is no more Lü, for she has been married for several years to an earnest Christian, and the two are serving the Lord together.

When we first heard of her contemplated marriage we were loth to let her leave Kucheng, but in talking to us about it, she said, "Do not be anxious about this matter. I am seeking the Lord's guidance. You say you are afraid it is the devil trying to get me away from the work here. But I promise that I will not leave unless it is the Lord's will. If He says I must go, I will go."

We had to leave her future with the Lord, and we knew that one of the Christians was right when he said, "The work in Kucheng may be harder without her, but as for her she will be a light wherever she goes."

She has remained faithful to the Church at Kucheng. Sunday after Sunday she is to be found there, and tries her best to bring others. Through heat or cold, rain or sunshine, she walks the four or five miles cheerfully, showing in word and deed Whose she is and Whom she serves, buying up the opportunities God gives her.

"Everlasting Pearl" is still seeking jewels for her Master, and the first one given to her new home was her husband's mother, a dear old lady, seventy years old, who was baptized two years ago. The two are firm friends. They have gone through sickness, persecution, and other deep waters together, but joy in the

Lord and in His Word has been their strength. When the day's work is done, the three who love God in that busy, worldly home have a quiet hour together for the reading of the Word and for praise and prayer. There at the Throne of Grace they gather strength and courage and patience. All these are needed, for the other members of the family are strongly opposed to the Gospel. Their sister-in-law weeps for their hardness of heart, and prays earnestly for their salvation.

We have followed "Everlasting Pearl" on her life's journey for nearly fifty years. She has aroused our pity for her in her heathen darkness, and has claimed our sympathy in her sufferings and trials. She has excited our admiration for her steadfast devotion, and stirred our hearts through her loving and zealous service. What is the outcome to be? Her voice is raised as eagerly as ever in testifying to the grace in Christ Jesus and salvation in His Name, but it is only able to reach a few of that vast unsaved throng. Shall we not unite our voices with hers? Her heart is lifted up in prayer to God for a lost world; shall we let her wrestle alone, and let the cry of many a despairing soul go unheeded? What is our part to be?

A cry as of pain, again and again
Is borne o'er the deserts and wide-spreading main;
A cry from the lands that in darkness are lying,
A cry from the hearts that in sorrow are sighing.
It comes unto me; it comes unto thee;
Oh what, oh what shall the answer be?

It comes to the soul that Christ has made whole,
The heart that is longing His Name to extol;
It comes with a chorus of pitiful wailing,
It comes with a plea which is strong and prevailing.
For Christ's sake to me; for Christ's sake to Thee;
Oh what, oh what shall the answer be?

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