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TRIP TO HONAN, IV.

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“*R*AP, rap rap!” “What noise is this?” It’s our cart-driver who is waking us up at half past three in the morning, as to-day we mean to visit a great temple a few miles off. It is summer time, and if we desire comfort we must be up very early and away before the sun pours his hot rays upon us.

By four, we are on our way; indeed, sometimes it is better to travel all night in the “dogdays.” We think we are up early, but see there are women already at work in the field picking cotton, grinding at the mills, or wending their way with heavy baskets to the market towns.

But, we also pass by a good many sleepers who at nightfall wrapped themselves up in their blankets and lay down by the road-side. Here are a dozen or more of weary sleepers huddled together on a threshing floor.

In speaking of women, it is a wonder how much hard work they do and how far they can walk and carry heavy loads, although as you must know, their feet are so crippled and small. As mere children their feet are bound up in swathes so tightly that often they are crushed out of shape, into a pulp. I have in my study a model of the shoe of a full grown Chinese woman. I have just measured it and find it is only four inches long from the heel to the toe, and two inches at the widest part. Yet, on such crippled ‘points’ they walk along and do their work.

It very very rarely the missionary sees a Chinese woman with feet of ordinary size.

Indeed, to have small feet is a badge of honor. They have no chance of marriage if they neglect this hard old custom. When a man wants a wife, “what kind of feet has she?” is the first question he asks as a rule. It is not very surprising, therefore, that in the fervor of his first love, he does not allow her to walk and so brings her to his home in a wheelbarrow. That’s the kind of wedding trip the poorer classes of China take.

But if girls and women in China are not kindly treated, you ask, how do you account for these beautiful stone arches we have passed beneath erected in honor of women.

Well, let us read the inscriptions on them. Here is one, fine and well built. A memorial was presented to the Emperor to allow this arch to be erected “in honor of a young widow who devoted her life to her mother-in-law for whose sake she restrained herself from suicide on her husband’s death. Her own mother taking ill, she cut off part of her own flesh, mixed it with medicine and so died. Memorial granted in 1875” all of which means that they kill these women by their hard customs, and then piously adorn their graves. Tomb-stones, monuments and flowers are beautiful over our friends’ graves; but a few more flowers when with us, is infinitely better.

Have you noticed these many little mounds or heaps of sand as we passed? Well, these are graves, seen on every hand. But when a child dies they heap up no mounds. Why, you ask. Because they believe children have no souls. And some of their wise men say that women have no souls. This is a sad truth to you boys and girls, concerning your Chinese sisters and brothers. Oh! how different you