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The Story of Mr. Peng, the Hunan Evangelist.

(By Dr. Griffith John, in 'L. M. S. Chronicle.')

Ten years ago Mr. Peng Lan-Seng was not only a heathen, but, like most of his fellow-provincials, bitterly anti-foreign and anti-Christian. He thoroughly believed in the bewitching power of Christianity, and had a wholesome dread of entering a missionary's house or chapel, lest he might be turned into a 'foreign devil.' The missionary's tea and cake he regarded as poison, and dared not touch either. He was a thorough believer in the whole Hunan story about the inhumanity of the foreigner, and the bestiality of the foreign religion.

Mr. Peng was also a notoriously bad man. He is never weary of telling people the story of his conversion; and when he does so,

doubt of the man. Many rumors reached us about his past life, which made us hesitate to admit him into our communion. He waited, and waited long. When at last he was admitted, some of us had grave doubts as to the wisdom of the step. Some were strongly in favor of prolonging the time of probation.

No sooner was Mr. Peng admitted than he began to work for Christ. He was ever to be found at the Kia-Kiai chapel, preaching away with all his might. Some of us felt that it was somewhat early for him to begin to exercise his gifts in this particular way, and that it would be well to put a stop to his preaching. But Mr. Peng was irrepresible. Preach he must, and preach he would. Very soon the salvation of Hunan became the centre of his thoughts. He began by working for the Hunanese in and around Hankow. His prayers on behalf of

All this time Mr. Peng was working without pay. But at last he came to the end of his resources, and was planning to leave the place in order to make a living elsewhere. He made known his circumstances to Mr. Sparham and myself. Feeling that he was by far too good a man to be lost to the work in Central China, we put our heads together, and ultimately found out a way to help him without drawing on the funds of the Society.

Peng's heart was in Hunan, and to Hunan he must go. Accounts of his early efforts in Hunan have been published already, so I need not enlarge at this time. The story of his entering Changsha with his Christian books; of his visit to the Yamens and presenting the officials, from the highest to the lowest, with Scriptures and tracts; of his trials with his clansmen; and of the plot laid against him by the gentry and his narrow escape, is a story full of interest and inspiration. But his great work in Hunan began with our visit to Heng Chou in March, 1897. He accompanied Mr. Sparham and myself on that journey, and was our fellow-helper and fellow-sufferer in all our work and trials. He was with us when we were pelted out of Heng Chou, and acted splendidly right through that trying time. Soon after we returned to Hankow we resolved to send him back with the view of establishing a mission in the City of Heng Chou. It required no small courage to return to that city so soon after the bitter experience through which we had passed. But Mr. Peng went joyfully. He managed to buy a house which he turned into a chapel, and began to work with his wonted energy and zeal. No sooner was the mission fairly started than the place was attacked by an infuriated mob, and the entire building was levelled with the ground. Mr. Peng and his family escaped without hurt, but all their property was stolen, and they were left penniless. Thinking that all was over for a time at least, he left for Hankow. He had not proceeded far, however, before he was overtaken by a number of messengers from the Heng Chou officials. They were sent to entreat him to return to Heng Chou and get everything settled quietly there. On his arrival at the city he found the officials in a very willing mood. They offered to indemnify him for all his losses, and to put up another chapel according to any plan he might propose. He accepted their terms, and as a result we have at Heng Chou now a fine chapel, built in foreign style. Mr. Peng speaks of it as a finer building than our Kia-Kiai chapel at Hankow, but built on the same model. When speaking of the Heng Chou chapel, the other day, he said:—'Pastors, when you see our chapel you will laugh for very joy. It is a fine building. I am sure you will be greatly pleased with it.'

But this is not all. There is a little church of from fifty to a hundred people meeting regularly at Heng Chou for worship. And this is not all. Mr. Peng has succeeded during these two years, with the help of a few fellow-workers, in establishing some ten to fifteen mission stations in the Siang Valley, of which five are in walled cities.

The converts in many places are providing themselves with places of worship. Mr.



DR. GRIFFITH JOHN.

MR. PENG.

REV. C. G. SPARHAM.

he never fails to remind his hearers that of all the sinners in China he was the chief. About three years ago Mr. Peng, a native of Changsha, the publisher of Chou Han's books, was in my study. Among other things he told me this interesting story: 'I want to tell you,' said he, 'what has brought me to Hankow. I have come to see what it is that has worked such a change in Peng Lan-Seng. He is a native of Changsha, and an old comrade of mine. He used to be the worst man in Changsha; but he has given up all his bad habits, and is now a new man. When I ask him the reason for this great change, he tells me that it is the Gospel that has done it, and I have come down in order to find out the truth about this matter.'

When, in 1892, Mr. Peng presented himself as a candidate, we all—the native helpers and foreign missionaries—stood in great

Hunan in those days were something indescribable. They were impassioned pleadings with God on behalf of his own people—his kindred according to the flesh. The missionaries of other missions were very much struck with them, and would sometimes speak of them as 'the thing of the meeting.' Mr. Peng is a thorough believer in prayer. A gentleman of the place invited Mr. Peng, Mr. Sparham, and myself to a feast yesterday. There were several others there, and among them a nephew of the Viceroy, Chang Chih-tung. Mr. Peng gave them the story of his conversion, and subsequent trials. It was most graphically told. 'I tell you what it is,' he said, in conclusion, 'if a man wants to be a genuine Christian, he must pray, and he must pray till the tears flow from his eyes, and the perspiration runs down his back. That has been my experience.'