

INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF MRS. W. F. ARMSTRONG.

Many years ago I was far away in the jungles of Siam. With me were two native preachers, two of the women who taught in our school and a school boy. We had also a Siamese Karen, a heathen whose elephant we had hired, and who knew the country we wished to traverse.

We found many Karen villages where no missionary had ever been. They were honest, upright people for the most part, hidden away in the dense jungles of those mountain ranges where the words of Christ had never come.

The forest was full of wild beasts and wilder men, but God was with us. We could not see the lurking dangers, but the angel of the Lord encamping round about us could see it all, and that was enough. We had nothing to fear from the Karens, but these mountains are infested with banditti who live by plunder, and murder for a livelihood.

One evening we came to a Karen village and to our surprise they would not receive us, nor allow us to enter at all. It was totally against Karen custom, but they had no welcome for us. So we camped for the night just outside under the trees. The men cut down bamboos and made a platform on which the women put up a curtain and we arranged ourselves for the night.

The men slept on the hides which covered the elephant beneath the load it carried on the march, first building great fires which they kept burning all night to keep away the tigers.

An encampment with its bright blaze lighting up the forest trees is a cheerful place, and we had several visitors that night. The Karens shut themselves up in their village, but there were others, travellers apparently, who crowded round the fires and listened while we told them of Jesus. They did not tire of hearing, but the preachers grew tired of telling; they had tramped a long way and had another march before them in the morning. So they lay down and went to sleep, but these men did not go away and while they would listen I talked, wondering why they stayed so long. At last I told them we had to leave early in the morning, and I was so tired I would have to rest. So they slowly moved off. To my surprise, when I came to mount the little platform where we slept, I found several pariah dogs had chosen to sleep under it, and through the night again and again, when there was any noise in the jungle, they rushed out barking and so guarded us all night. Pariah dogs are much like rats in disposition, as bold to steal and as shrewd to run away, but this night they domesticated themselves and formed a body guard in force.

With the early dawn we were away to a village where we thought we were sure of a cordial welcome. It was Saturday and we would spend Sunday with them. We reached there at noon, but they did not

seem at all glad to see us. The chief, a white-haired old man, told us we were welcome to stay in a part of his house, but they had all to go away; word had come from another village calling them to a council and they must all go, but would be back next day. So we settled ourselves for a rest at least, disappointed that we were to have no hearers.

Before the old man left, he went out and opened up a limekiln, which was burning on the edge of the green around which the village was built. As I saw him do it, it came to me like a revelation that that kiln was opened up to bury us all in, where no trace of us could ever be discovered.

The old man did it for that very purpose, and the word of the Lord came to me that I might pray and see His salvation.

A great horror of death came over me, and I told the Christians with me I was certain some terrible danger was impending, and asked if there was anywhere we could flee. They answered, "Mamma, we are safest in the village. The Karens will not harm us, the forest is full of danger. Mamma is tired from walking so far, when she is rested she will not be afraid. Mamma has never been afraid when there was real danger, why is she afraid now?"

So I said no more, but when we gathered on the green for our evening worship, just ourselves, not a heathen visible anywhere, only empty houses round us, a great burden lay on my spirit—and while they conducted the worship, I poured out my soul in prayer. My mother would never know what had become of me, others would be hindered from coming there by our mysterious fate, and I pleaded for God's salvation till the burden all passed away, and I rose from my knees sure my prayer was heard.

Just afterwards, in the twilight, we saw the Karens coming back. When the old man came slowly up the ladder into his house, I said to him: "Grandfather, we are glad to see you back, we thought you would not be back till to-morrow." But the old man said, "Humph!" and went silently out to his room. About eight in the evening we heard a noise of elephants trampling through the jungle. They stopped near the house and the men dismounted and tethered them with much noise, then came up into the house where we were. They were the same men I had been talking to the night before, but I did not recognize them.

They passed by us and went out to the old man's room and talked not in Karen which we could understand, but in another language—while they talked we went to sleep. About three in the morning I was awakened by their tramping past me on the springing floor. They got on their elephants and went away into the darkness.

Some eighteen months afterwards the chief of this village sent a man to us asking for a preacher to come and teach them, they wanted to be Christians.