

IDOL FESTIVAL IN HONAN.

By our Missionary, Rev. J. Griffiths.

Not long since Mr. Goforth and I took four days in which to visit a city forty miles from here at which a great idol-festival was in progress.

After travelling from early morning until night in a Chinese cart (about as comfortable as being tumbled downstairs in a dry goods box), we reached our destination, and found the brethren who had already gone from our other stations occupying the best available hotel in the city. They had rented the whole main building for a couple of weeks.

But do not begin to imagine them extravagant, for the place would not be considered a respectable horse-stable by many people at home, and the entire rental was only about three dollars.

I wish it were possible for me to adequately describe the surging multitudes of heathen worshippers who filled the streets during those days.

The Old Grandmother.

The chief centres of attractions for them were two small mountains outside the high walls of the city. Upon one of these is situated the temple of Lao Nai Nai ("The Old Grandmother"), who is supposed to have the power to grant male children to her suppliants, and upon this boon the Chinaman conceives his comfort and happiness in the future world to depend. This temple is the chief resort for the multitudes of worshippers, and especially for the thousands of women who yearly assemble to pour their entreaties into the deaf ears of the goddess.

The Buddhist and Taoist priests, to save themselves the trouble of fighting over the spoils, have an arrangement by which in alternate years they gather in the revenues from the worshippers.

Almost all the preaching at the "fair" is done either at the inn or on this hill-top, and consequently the priests are very hostile. However, the crowds were more respectful and more willing to listen this year than ever before.

Some "Ways That are Dark."

Upon this hill, too, in the vicinity of the temple, is displayed a scene of noise and activity that seems very strange to a foreigner. Here a long line of booths is erected on either side of the pathway leading up the hillside, where not only Chinese wares of almost every description, but also some articles of foreign manufacture, are sold.

There, again, are great numbers with

their small stock-in-trade spread out on the dusty ground. Among these one sees thread, and other small articles, while one chap had a pile of old empty tins which had once held canned fruits and meats, and which he or his friends had possibly purloined from the premises of some missionary. Elsewhere, Chinese jugglers, ventriloquists, tricksters, medicine-sellers, acrobats and peep-show men were busily and noisily engaged in their attempts to deceive and fleece unwary victims.

Stones of Remembrance.

About a mile distant from this hill is another, upon which are situated several temples, and shrines, the principal one being to Lao Tien Yeh ("The God of Heaven," or "Old Man of the Sky"). Mr. Mitchell and I took about half a day to visit the score or more of such places on the latter hill, and many saddening sights we saw. As we climbed the road leading to the mountain top we passed a couple of men struggling up with a nicely cut and engraved stone, about as large as an ordinary tombstone. It bore the inscription, together with the date, etc.: "Prayed for a son, and received the fulfilment." Later on we saw the place where such testimonials are placed, and it looked as though all the stones from a large cemetery had been gathered and piled together. Some were quite large and fine, and all bore, among other records, the one inscription which I have mentioned. A building close at hand was also crowded with fancy scrolls, placards, etc., recording the goodness and faithfulness of the "Old Grandmother" in granting a happy answer to her suppliant's prayer.

Looking Out For "Cash."

I cannot do more than briefly refer to three or four of the many places we visited on this mountain. The first was a temple to the goddess Lao Nai Nai before mentioned. In it were a number of horrible and high-colored images about six or eight feet high, and apparently representing the twelve animals of the Chinese cycle—the dog, ape, hog, cow, goat, dragon, tiger, serpent, etc. In front of the door, outside, were set some tables, and on these were a great number of little images of boys. As the people came crowding up to this place the priest in charge would, every few moments, strike a gong and call upon them to prostrate themselves in the dust and strike their foreheads upon the ground. However, there was another part of their work which these evil-looking wretches of priests looked after even more sharply, namely, that a certain number of "cash" should be thrown by the worshippers into the baskets sitting at every temple and shrine.