

THREE HUNDRED MILES ON HORSEBACK IN CHINA.

BY REV. V. C. HART.

March 7th.—A sultry, windless evening was followed by a copious downfall of rain. The early dawn presented heavy black clouds passing quietly yet steadily above the pine clad hills, and, anon settling earthward threatening to drench still more the flooded valleys.

The prospect for full congregations was not flattering as the Christians live scattered over a wide district. The rain increased in violence and I had given up hope of a public service, when we were informed that the church was well filled. A sermon was preached to a well behaved and manifestly appreciative audience. Several in the audience, principally elderly men, instead of responding with the stereotyped "Amen," invariably at the close of a passage or fitting application, gave sanction nods which are quite as helpful and do not attract so much attention.

It is most amusing, however, as one is preaching to a heathen assembly to observe some old elders doing the very same, while the preacher may be shooting his heaviest charges against heathenism, attacking with great zeal the very idols which the assenters have all their lives worshipped and fully expect to the full measure of their days.

There is very little contradiction in our most mixed and informal assemblies, the speaker has his own way however much he may court controversy.

There is a tacit understanding to allow a speaker the largest liberty, to touch upon any and all subjects, slaughter all creeds, call in question the ideas upon which their faith has rested for thousands of years, and they will pass all his eloquence as unconcerned as though a mountebank were reciting stories in a tea shop.

It is not a simple matter to interest a Chinese audience. There are before you say three hundred people, mostly men. The boy of from ten to fifteen always manages to sandwich himself somewhere to crunch peanuts, chestnuts, watermelon seeds or hard pears, and ever on the alert for tricks, especially so when you are drawing your finest comparisons, or telling an effective story.

There is the old man with a thin growth of soft hair upon chin and upper lip, the pride of old age, which he fondly nurses

while his eyes are fixed upon you; five chances out of ten he is deaf in one or both ears, and is too polite to tell you so until after service, when a personal question may be put to him and he replies by saying "I cannot hear."

You see before you the vain empty headed literati who can quote the Four Books almost *verbatim*. He has managed by bribery or surreptitiously using smuggled copies of the classics at examination to obtain a degree. He has forthwith put on a pair of goggles, and cultivated his finger nails, until their five inch growth demands silver cases on their backs for protection.

He walks to the front seat, sits as he supposes Confucius did, arranges his right hand palm upward with finger nails neatly tucked under his flowing sleeve. He looks wise, turns to right and left to see if all eyes are upon him, stands up, arranges his silk girdle, takes off his goggles, puts them on, strokes his thin moustache if he has one, yawns, looks cynical at the preacher, gets up and shuffles away to the street.

There are farmers, mostly honest, shop-keepers, quick-witted and attentive, a good sprinkling of burden-bearers, whose lives are elevated a little above the beasts, then there are waiters, beggars and tramps.

Out of the number there may be fifty who have in some way heard and learnt enough about Christianity to put them on a par with a Sunday-school boy of ten years of age. It will require tact and experience to manage and find something to feed such an assembly.

My congregation was not so haphazardly made up this Sabbath morning, yet there were some of all the classes I have mentioned, except the literati who seldom trouble a Sunday service. Here were men from many miles distant who had come through the mud to hear preaching; three years ago they were totally ignorant of the Gospel, now they find the text in the Bible, follow the preacher closely, and confess a hope in the Son of God.

The Sunday-school in the afternoon, although not large, was a season of some interest, and the congregation in the evening, notwithstanding a pelting rain, was large. This was my first Sunday here and I cannot express the pleasure it gave me to worship with so many professors of Christianity, who a few short years ago