

World of Missions

A Visit to Formosa.

Through the kindness of the Foreign Missionary secretary, we publish the following interesting account, by Rev. Harvey Grant, of Honan, of a visit to Formosa:—

Wei Hui Fu, April 12, 1899.

Dear Mr. MacKay:—I was privileged last summer in carrying out a long cherished plan of visiting Formosa, a visit which, while in itself offering many attractions, was rendered immeasurably more pleasant and profitable by the presence there of my old and intimate friends, Mr. and Mrs. Gauld, who exerted themselves in every possible way to enable me to see the work of our mission in all its respects. Dr. MacKay also, whom I met frequently, gave me much valuable information about the work and the methods followed. In going from Honan to Formosa, I travelled most of the way overland, in this way touching at many mission centres, among others Chi-ning Chou (American Presbyterian North), in Shantung Province; Ching Keao Pu (Southern Presbyterian), in Kiangso Province, Shanghai; Foo Chau, Hing Hwa; Chin Chaw (English Presbyterian), and Amoy, in Fukien Province, enlarging my knowledge of missions and mission methods at each place.

After a choppy, disagreeable passage from the mainland of China across the Formosa Channel, I reached Formosa on the evening of the 14th of May. The first thing to attract the attention of a visitor from China is the great difference in the general appearance of the country from that which he has, but a few hours ago, left behind. For, while on the Chinese mainland, the mountains appear bare, scorched and barren, in Formosa they are clothed with luxuriant verdure to their very summits, lending an indescribable charm of beauty to the whole country. So the scheme which meets one when steaming across the bar into Tamsui River is truly one of great natural beauty such as one seldom meets. Nor is this beauty of scenery confined to the immediate neighborhood of Tamsui, but wherever one travels over the island, fresh vistas of grandeur and beauty burst upon the eye. This is all very different from our surroundings in the great plain of North Honan, where the monotonous flat is almost totally unbroken by mountains or hills.

I remained in Formosa eight weeks, and personally visited, in company with Mr. Gauld, as many of the stations as it was deemed wise to visit, owing to the disturbed state of the country. The activity of the rebels renders life and property so unsafe on the eastern coast of the island that the Japanese would issue no passports for travel there. We were disappointed in not being able to visit this part of the mission, but what I saw on the west side may, I understand, be taken as a fair sample of the whole. I shall then attempt to tell something of what I saw, and make a few comparisons with the condition of affairs in Honan.

First, as to modes of travel. In North China we travel by cart, barrow, houseboat, or walk. In Formosa we board a steam launch or a native boat at Tamsui and run nine miles southward to Tek Cham, the present railway terminus, thence we, with a coolie to carry our baggage, tramp about on foot visiting the various stations, climb-

ing up and down mountains and wading across streams, or it may be that we hire sedan chairs, which is one of the most common modes of conveyance here, and travel with greater ease and speed. Thus several stations are visited throughout this region, Mr. Gauld talking to all who may drop into the chapels during the day time and addressing the crowds who come to the services in the evenings, which are generally large enough to fill the chapels comfortably, and listen attentively to what is said. The regular Sabbath services—forenoon, afternoon, and evening—were also well attended. On our way home by rail we stop off here and there along the line, and visit Christians who, removed from larger centres, shine individually as lights in dark places.

Everywhere in Formosa we note how luxuriant is the natural vegetation, in marked contrast to Honan, where such vegetation is comparatively scant. In Formosa large tracts of mountain land seem to remain in their primitive tangle of shrubs and bush, unoccupied by man. In Honan there is little unoccupied and uncultivated. In Formosa forest is abundant; in Honan I have not yet seen anything worthy of the name. In Formosa the population does not seem to be so dense as in Honan. In this great plain floods are of such frequent occurrence as to keep the masses constantly on the thin edge of starvation, while Formosa, being mountainous, is not equally subject to such a chronic state of flood, although floods are frequent and disastrous. What it gains, however, in immunity from floods it partially loses in the devastations wrought by typhoons and white ants. The climate of Formosa would seem to be more trying to Europeans than that of Honan, for, while the temperature registered by the thermometer seems to be little, if any, higher than in Honan, there is constantly so much moisture in the air, that the heat is felt to be more oppressive; moreover, the clear, bracing, frosty weather of the Honanese winter is unknown in Formosa, so that there is little respite from the heats of summer. Then, the dreaded "Formosa fever" quite outstrips the malaria of Honan in its severity and duration.

As to the people, the Chinese in Formosa may properly be called a "migratory race," since they have settled there only within the last few hundred years, while, on the other hand, the Chinese in Honan are the direct lineal descendants of those who lived there thousands of years ago, reckoning an unbroken descent from the ancients, and thus Honan is their ancestral possession. In Formosa, in addition to the savages, there are three classes of people, differing in language and race characteristics, while in Honan there is one race and one language.

Here in Honan the population is a consolidated unit of dense heathenism, while in Formosa the population is composed of several well-defined and disintegrated elements, lacking the strength of unity to withstand innovations. The excessive conservatism and antagonism to outside influence, prevalent among the Honanese, finds its counterpart in the greater enterprise and susceptibility to new ideas of the Formosans.

While in Honan the general attitude of the people toward religious matters is marked rather by indifference than anything else,

the temples tumbling into ruins, the worshippers worshipping their idols rather from force of custom than from any religious convictions, in Formosa, as in South China, generally, the people are much more religiously inclined, keeping their temples in good repair and being faithful in worship; this, as may be surmised, may be a decided help to the Gospel preacher or the reverse, generally the former, I believe, for it is generally easier to prove the superiority of the Gospel over any false system of religious belief which may be entertained, and to persuade the idol worshipper to forsake his dumb idol for Christ, the living Savior, than it is to arouse religious sentiment within a man that he may appreciate religious truth at all.

There are marked differences between the social condition of the Chinese in Formosa and those in Honan, for while both Honanese and Formosan laborers are uniformly industrious, the former cultivating their wheat, beans, peas, cotton, the latter their rice and tea, the Honanese are poverty-stricken and the Formosans live in somewhat better circumstances. In Honan a man's daily wages range from five to ten cents, while in Formosa a laborer receives from ten to fifteen cents and a mechanic from fifteen to forty cents a day. On the other hand, the cost of living in Honan is somewhat less than in Formosa, which in some measure compensates for the difference in wages, notwithstanding the wages in Honan is a bare living wage, while in Formosa the wages may afford a slight surplus to lay by. So far as I can judge, the proportion of educated men in Formosa is somewhat greater than in Honan, and all in Formosa are more conversant than the Honanese with modern affairs through being in closer touch with outside civilization.

I presume there is little danger of the missionary in North Formosa being asked what a railroad or a steamboat is like, for the people are all acquainted with them, although in South Formosa the railroad is still unknown. But in Honan such questions are almost a daily occurrence in the experience of the missionaries. Taking all these facts into account, it will be seen how different are the conditions under which mission work is carried on in Formosa and in Honan, differences which would render it most unwise to attempt the adoption of the same methods of work in both fields. The plan widely adopted in Formosa, viz., the employment by the mission of suitable natives as preachers of the Gospel, and the laying of the burden of the preaching upon them from the earliest years of the mission, providing out of mission funds the minimum amount necessary for their daily living expenses. Such a plan can be safely adopted in Formosa, where the wages are so high that the natives usually live quite above want; the mere pittance of sufficient quantity to buy their daily bread can be no inducement to them to become preachers, but in Honan, were such a plan adopted, multitudes would crowd the church, all hoping to receive employment one way or other with sufficient to provide means for keeping body and soul together. In Honan the prospect of a bare living wage is sufficient to induce the majority of the natives to enter the church merely for the sake of temporal gain. The measures taken by the missionaries in Formosa for the preservation of health by the erection of suitable residences in the most healthful and convenient situation obtainable, must be most highly commended, and is worthy of imitation at the earliest possible date in Honan, that we may escape from the pestilential miasma of these low-lying, ill-constructed, badly ventilated, native hovels in which it has been the lot of many of our missionaries thus far to live and work. Hoping that these scattered notes may be of some slight use, believe me, ever your servant,

W. HARVEY GRANT.