

Opening Pen-Hsien.

(Continued.)

BY REV. GEORGE E. HARTWELL.

CHENTU, WEST CHINA, *January 24, 1898.*

In a former letter it was stated how the Lord had led His servants in Chentu to open a new station in a city thirty miles distant, named Pen-Hsien.

The difficulties of obtaining even a shop in a city of this kind was also briefly sketched—how that, notwithstanding the usual barriers, the evangelist, sent in answer to prayer, found a friend, who, by his recommendations, assisted the evangelist in obtaining a shop. Lastly, how the officials issued most favorable proclamations and posted them in the gates of the city, where everybody could read.

Following apostolical methods, two native evangelists were sent. This was their first experience in opening a strange city. It was with much fear and trembling they opened the doors. The Chinese in one respect are similar to the Athenians, always ready "either to tell or to hear some new thing."

For a week the two brethren sat at opposite ends of a table as the crowd came and went, exhorting, preaching, and answering questions. The days were spent in the street chapel, the evenings in the large tea shops where, in hot weather, the literary men gather, sip tea and talk over the news of the day. These tea shops are the newspapers of China. The principal subject of conversation at this time was the new doctrine that was being preached. Some said it was Roman Catholicism in disguise. Others said no, Ho Sien Sung (my Chinese name) was an Englishman, and the English do not propagate Roman Catholicism in China. The priests are almost without exception from France, hence the Chinese differentiate Protestantism and Roman Catholicism according as the preachers are English or French. The literary standing of the two evangelists soon won them friends among the students, and once the students of China are reached the victory is practically assured. Before the week was over the earnestness of these two men so deeply impressed the students of Pen-Hsien, that those whom we feared would become our most bitter opponents are to-day our warmest friends. The hearts of the Chinese respond to truth when set forth by earnest believers.

The work begun under such favorable circumstances has been most fruitful. The enemy was not always quiet. Some attempts were made to frighten the landlord, also to hinder the progress of the work, but in vain. A great change has come over the Chinese people within the last two or three years. China's Rip-Van-Winkle sleep is hastily approaching its end. The seeds sown in China during the last decade are already maturing. What triumphs are in store for the Gospel! Happy the eyes that shall see her fruitful vines laden with precious fruit. Let us now see how wonderfully the Holy Spirit has been working in Pen-Hsien in answer to prayer.

November 17, Pen-Hsien was visited for the third time. What a change had taken place in four months. Three of the Chentu brethren beside the evangelist were present. Sunday morning arrived. It was market day and the city was crowded. At nine o'clock we met for prayer, ten o'clock the front of the chapel was opened and the preaching began. The chapel was crowded. The evangelists spoke in turn. A student, sixteen years of age, a bright young man, was present; he has been a boarding pupil

for four years in the schools, and has shown an earnestness in the Gospel that bespeaks another laborer in the vast vineyard. Two evangelists had already spoken when up jumped this young man and said, though he was their (the congregation's) younger brother, yet he had a message for them. His young, passionate face soon attracted a full house, who listened most attentively to his testimony. From ten o'clock until dusk the doors remained open and the crowd came and went as, turn about, we told the Gospel story. At dusk we sat down to rest; we had been, so to speak, fishing all day, and we asked, would the Lord Jesus come along that way and bring the fish.

An evening meeting had been announced for those who desired to obtain salvation through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Seven o'clock the lamps were lit. A tap is heard on the outside door. A voice inside inquires, "Who's there?" If an interested person he gives his name, if not, there are departing footsteps. One by one they come. The available space in the inner room was very limited, being only 8 x 12 feet, yet as they came there would be a little tighter squeezing until a seat was found. Thus they came, much, I imagine, as the early Christians did when they wished to have a quiet worship.

Sixteen individuals were present—sixteen souls seeking light and salvation. The apostles needed divine help to keep their nets from breaking, otherwise their labor would have been in vain. To whom could these sixteen souls be trusted to be led into the kingdom of God? Just one—the Holy Spirit. Hence a lesson in Acts—subject, the disciples waiting, the disciples receiving. A short exhortation followed and then a testimony meeting. They knew nothing about a Methodist class meeting, but the spirit of the old class-meeting was present if the forms were absent. There were no set phrases, no eloquence, but simple testimony of how they were led to believe in the Gospel. The first to speak was a doctor who has a good practice and is well known. He was the first to take an out-and-out stand for the truth. In stating his experience he said: "I was persecuted a little shortly after I put my name down as an inquirer. Several of my father's family became sick, and they said it was a punishment upon them because I had left the paths of my ancestors. I then prayed that God would restore them, and He has, and now they have nothing to say."

One most striking feature of the testimonies was their implicit confidence in prayer, their simple faith in God. It was a delightful season and well repaid all the trouble, toil and anxiety of the past few years in acquiring this difficult language to hear these men testify for Christ.

Six months have passed. Forty names are now recorded in the church register as inquirers and probationers. One has been baptized and the work continues to grow. Scholars, merchants, clerks, tailors, carpenters and workmen are all represented. This is one instance of the change that is rapidly coming over China. The harvest truly is great but the laborers are few.

The evangelist in charge is supported by the Grafton Street Methodist Sunday School, Halifax, N.S.

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