

AN OLD WOMAN OF FORMOSA.

You have read how they treat baby girls in Formosa. You know that every child in China is taught to be filial and to reverence the aged. But old people are not much better treated than girl babies. Listen to this story.

One day some four years ago I was going home from our Hospital. For days it had rained and the roads outside the streets were very slippery. When about half way home I came to a poor old woman carrying a load of sticks; or rather, she had been carrying them. She had fallen and the shoulder pole prevented her regaining her feet, for she was very weak. I removed the pole and helped her up. She stood against an old tree root, panting for some time before she was able to speak. Then she gasped out some broken thanks, and was very grateful for a kind word spoken to her.

How I wish I could send you a drawing of her as she was that day. I am no artist. So you must just imagine an old, bent wizened body, and her face covered with deep furrows. She had known what it was to work; those furrows were proof of that. She was terribly dirty; water had not been one of her friends.

She said, "Don't worry, it will soon be all over; I can't stand this any longer, I am too old for it."

"Grandmother," I asked, "What will soon be over, tell me what you mean?"

I thought she meant this hard life would soon kill her, but it was worse than that, as you will hear from herself. For three days it had rained, and she had not been able to gather sticks for sale; the neighbors had given her some potatoes to keep her from starving. One of the bundles of sticks she was going to give to these neighbors, the other she was going to sell and buy some opium; she had already some but not enough to kill her. So she said, "It will soon be all over."

I looked perplexed and she noticed it, for again she said, "Don't worry, I owe no money, and I have enough to buy a coffin and to bury me, just enough, and the neighbors know all about it, so it's all right." Remonstrance with such a poor old creature was useless. I could only say, "Grandmother, it isn't all right, it's all wrong, you must not kill yourself. Have you no friends to care for you?" She said, "My husband is dead. I had a son who married and lived with me, but soon after his marriage

he died too." The daughter-in-law had lived with her some time, then she married a soldier.

One day the soldier told her that he was ordered to the mainland. He asked the old lady to go with them, promising to look after her and give her a home in their house.

She sold her things for some dollars and said good-bye to her friends in Taiwanfu. "I was both glad and sorry to go," she said. Glad, because she was going back to her ancestral home, and sorry, because no one would know her, for she had been so long away.

They got to Foochow all right; the soldier and his wife left her in the boat to look after the things while they got lodgings, when they would return for her. She waited all that day and night, and for days she looked in vain for them. The boatmen were kind and gave her some rice, but she could not eat. She became more wretched when she found that they had taken everything away. "They left me nothing to look after but my own old self," she sadly said. She waited on. Poor old creature, she had been deceived by those who should have befriended her.

The boatmen advised her to go back to Formosa with them, where she was known and would get work and help. They gave her a free passage back. She began her old work of gathering sticks. By meagre living she managed to scrape enough to buy a pig which she fed and sold. The money she got was put aside for her coffin and burial, so she thought it was all right.

I could not leave her in her present mood. Something had to be done. She seemed truthful, but as she was a mainland woman with a peculiar accent, I wondered if I understood her story aright. I promised to pay for the sticks. I got her to leave them while she came back a short distance to the house of a Christian where I could make further enquiries.

I told one of our women the story as I have told you, and asked her if she thought it was true? She said, "I am quite sure it is all true, for I have bought sticks from her for over thirty years. She has been a hard-working honest woman."

I sat down and told her the old old story as simply as I could. She promised not to kill herself. I left praying that the Christian sister, who was busy cooking a meal for her, might be the means used to touch her heart.

Our coolie took her some rice and the