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In the "Far West" of  
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IN THE " FAR WEST " OF CHINA.

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Methodist Episcopal Mission, West China.

(Second Edition.)

The province of Sz-chuan, and indeed all West China, is cut off from the rest of the world. Even those who speak or write about China seldom have the West in mind. Most people regard Hankow as somewhere near the centre of this portion of the empire, whereas Chentu, which is nearly a thousand miles farther up the river from Hankow, is the real western metropolis.

It is not strange that the relative importance of this portion of the Flowery Kingdom should be overlooked. Twenty years ago almost nothing was known of it. Few travellers had ever visited it. Also the natural features of the country change so remarkably a few miles above Ichang, that one is easily lead to suppose that the boundary of the empire is at this place; for, instead of the broad river flowing quickly through level plains, we

suddenly come to range upon range of rugged mountains barring the way to the great West. There is one way through, however. The mighty Yang-tsi has plowed a deep furrow through the mountains and has formed a plain, though exceedingly difficult, highway to those distant regions.

At Ichang, some 900 miles from Shanghai, it becomes necessary to leave the steamer and embark in a Chinese junk for the rest of the voyage. The junk is one peculiar to this part of China, and well adapted to battle with the rapids which are to be encountered. It must be towed almost the entire distance. As the trackers set off on their four-hundred-mile stretch of pulling the boat through the solitude of these great gorges and over the swift rapids to Chung-king, one feels that now indeed he is leaving the world behind. The voyage is dangerous to life and property. Many a junk comes to grief in the swift waters of the whirlpools and rapids. At the start an offering is made to the river gods. A chicken is killed and the blood and feathers are smeared on the bow of the boat, firecrackers are let off, and sticks of burning incense set up here and there on board. One day our boat hung for an hour in a most perilous place in the rapids. The trackers

tugged for that time in vain on the quarter of a mile of bamboo rope, at the end of which we were suspended. All were praying, whether to false gods or the true One, for it seemed certain that we should be wrecked. After such an experience one is not surprised to see the ignorant heathen boatmen throw out offerings of rice and cash-paper to appease the dragon whom they imagine is gripping the bottom of the junk.

A month's voyage brings one to Chung-king. This city, nearly 1,300 miles from the sea-coast, is the door of the West, the city through which passes most of the traffic of 60,000,000 people with the outside world. Thousands of junks are employed on the river below, and other thousands ply the Yang-tsi and its tributaries above, carrying freight to all parts of the land. There are no wagon roads, no wheeled vehicles, not even wheelbarrows, excepting in a few well-favored districts. The country is too rough to admit of their use. Roads lead over the mountains in series of steps, in many places cut into the solid rock. The hard-working coolie is the patient burden-bearer in most parts of this territory.

Nevertheless, measured by Chinese standards, the province of

Sz-chuan, with its \*40,000,000 souls, is a most fertile and prosperous one. The natural resources are inexhaustible. Coal and iron are very abundant. The best producing salt wells in the empire are here. The government derives more salt revenue from Sz-chuan than from any or perhaps all other provinces. Real famines are unknown, though there have been two partial famines within the last forty years. In ancient times the land was covered with subtropical forests. Now it is all under cultivation, excepting the tops of the higher mountains. Rice is the principal crop.

There is a large and valuable commerce. The imports are chiefly cotton and cotton goods, oil-lamps, clocks, and other manufactured articles. The exports are mainly opium, salt, silk, vegetable wax, Tibetan wool, and great quantities of Chinese medicinal herbs.

The people or their recent ancestors have largely come from other provinces. Many think them more able than the majority of their race. They have known nothing of the outside world until very recent years. I never met one of them who had been

\*Later estimates place the population at from 60,000,000 to 67,000,000.

farther than the boundaries of China. There are no newspapers published in the province, though a few are sent from Shanghai. The telegraph connects some of the more important cities with the outside world. The imperial post carries mail only to Chung-king.

The missionary problem in the province of Sz-chuan is to bring the Gospel to this 60,000,000 people, shut out from the rest of the world, a people superior in intellect, their scholars highly cultured according to the Chinese standards, but until the last few years almost absolutely ignorant of everything excepting what chanced to fall within the narrow circle of their own horizon.

As to what the Gospel has to overcome, I can only speak from what I have experienced during a seven years' residence in Chung-king. Idolatry is not the greatest obstacle. Men generally are willing to have the folly of idolatry exposed, and will sometimes even help out in the argument. This is not quite so true of the women. Ancestral worship is a religion which strikes its roots most deeply into their hearts and lives. It is a subject which needs to be spoken of very carefully, never sneeringly, if one hopes to retain the respect of the people. But ancestral worship com-

pared with other false systems is commendable in many respects. Without it the Chinese nation would have disintegrated long ago. Moreover, sincere honor and respect to parents is not only in accordance with the Bible, but also a good stepping-stone to true reverence of God. For is not He the great Father of all men?

A far greater obstacle to the rapid spread of the Gospel is the spirit of avarice which is seen on every hand. Men will "starve, bleed, and die" not for gold only, but for the filthy brass cash as well, each piece of which is worth only one-sixteenth of a cent. There is need of industry, perseverance, and the most rigid economy upon the part of all, even the most saintly in China, but beyond this the spirit of covetousness impels them to do and to leave undone that which absolutely prevents them from receiving salvation. At the judgment-day they will be more condemned by the tenth commandment than by the first.

Polygamy prevails to a considerable extent. Drinking is a serious evil. Opium-smoking is very common. Of late years the drug has been produced in great quantities in the province itself. The climate is so mild that two crops of grain or vegetables are produced in one year on most of the land. The poppy plant is



now taking up so much of the land available for the spring crops, and requires such an enormous amount of labor and fertilization, that it is no exaggeration to say that all the people, rich and poor, the good as well as the evil, now pay twenty per cent. more for their rice than they would need to pay, were it not for the drain on account of opium. If the Chinese race fails to attain that leading place in the world prophesied by many who have studied their possibilities, the failure will be as much the result of this vice of opium-smoking as anything else. This is the opinion of the enlightened Chinamen at least. But it has been proved many times that the Gospel can save the opium sot as truly as it can the scholar. The churches in China all have members who were once confirmed opium-smokers.

Having freely considered the obstacles, let us turn our attention to the manifest advantages which missionaries enjoy in preaching the Gospel in this western province. And first, the language is not so varied as in other parts of the empire. With the exception of a few aborigines, practically all of the people speak the Mandarin dialect; that is to say, good spoken language is the Mandarin. It is true, of course, that the uneducated

classes and the women need to have it explained to them. No interpreter is needed before going fifty miles from home, as in some parts in China. One can travel all over the province and down river as far as Hankow, and be understood everywhere. There is no other dialect in all China, so universally understood.

Moreover, the people are, as a rule, friendly to us. There has not been the intense opposition such as has been manifested in other parts of China. Foreigners of the worst classes are almost unknown. All who have gone there have been men of good influence with few exceptions. We have longed for the time when we should have steam communication with the outside world. But this inconvenience has been to the advantage of the Gospel in one respect at least; it has kept the worst foreign elements out until the natives have come to understand that Christianity produces honest men. There are some classes not friendly, it is true. The officials and the conservative scholars are the same in their opposition here as elsewhere. As they hope for political preferment, so do they oppose these Western innovations, which are sure to operate against them. But as "the common people heard Him gladly" in Christ's day, so it is in West China to-

day. The common people, the merchants and the artisans, listen to the Gospel message with sincere respect. There have been two widely spread riots, besides the interruption to the work last year. But the missionaries have returned each time, and the people begin to realize that the Gospel has come to be a permanency in their land.

Another advantage which will become more evident as the years go by is that they are comparatively well-to-do. Poor compared with us they certainly are. But compared with the Chinese in the eastern part of the empire they are in comfortable circumstances. This means that they have more money for self-support. We have already found this to be true in practice as in theory. Our church in Chung-king more than supported its own pastor. There was not a wealthy man among them, but each gave something. The amount of money annually wasted in ancestral worship and idolatrous rites would more than suffice to carry on a well-equipped church work in all its branches. It would doubtless be enough to support the hospitals, asylums, and poor-houses, which are almost totally lacking at present.

Seven societies are working in the province at present. They

are the China Inland, the American Methodists, the London Missionary Society, the American Baptists, the Church of England, the English Friends, and the Canadian Methodists. The territory has been divided between these societies, so that there shall be no needless overlapping of work. A permanent boundary committee has been appointed which derives its authority from the general missionary body. There is much sympathy and co-operation between these "seven churches." It results largely, I think, from the feeling which all experience most keenly, that the great need is more workers. Give a missionary from five to ten thousand square miles of territory and a million souls for his parish, with the nearest foreigner fifty or eighty miles distant, and he is not in a position to object very strongly to another Christian worker moving in to divide the field. But the new worker does not come, and large tracts of thickly populated country remain barely touched once a year by the wandering evangelist.

The Lord wants more men to give their lives to West China.

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