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The Golden Hour in West China

WHERE EAST IS WEST
AND WEST IS EAST

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Rapids on the Yangtse

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SHUT in on all sides by almost impenetrable mountains, in the very heart of Asia, lies a wonderful land, but little known to the outside world. On its western border lie the snow-capped mountains of Tibet. On its east side are piled range on range of mountains which separate it from the rest of China. Almost its only outlet to the rest of the world lies in the wonderful waterway of the Yangtse, which by the persistent effort of ages has worn for itself a tortuous channel through magnificent gorges many miles in length and over raging rapids which seem almost to baffle the ingenuity of man to conquer. By the aid of hundreds of coolies, and after long days and weeks of dangerous travel, one at length finds himself in this novel country where the people live a life which seems to take him back hundreds of years in the history of man, and yet where the opportunities for doing things oppress with their abundance. This land is known by the prosaic name of West China, but this is misleading, for the mountains so separate it from China that it is practically another land. We find here a territory as large as France with a population larger. The natural resources have made it already the richest province of China, and yet these are scarcely touched. A coal mine in one's back yard is a common experience. Mineral wealth and agricultural possibilities astonish the man looking for financial prospects. The great Chengtu plain, in the center of this territory, is one of the most remarkable localities in the world. About forty by ninety miles in extent, with an artificial system of irrigation dating back to before the time of Christ, with numerous walled cities and well-cultivated fields, it is said to be the most highly productive and thickly populated piece of land in the world.

The peoples of this district are unlike those met elsewhere. In the eastern part they seem to be largely of

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Chinese origin, having come from the various provinces of China after the great wars of the early centuries, when the original inhabitants were practically annihilated. Unlike the other provinces of China no one claims to be a native of this province. All are immigrants from other



A Salt Well

provinces. These peoples have mingled with the wild tribes on the western borders and have produced a virile, sturdy, restless people, quite unlike the Chinese in other parts of the country. To the far west the population is made up largely of the various wild tribes, speaking different languages, with different customs and habits, fierce and warlike in some parts, yet strangely open to Christian influences. Some of the tribes numbering 500,000 and more are yet waiting among these mountains to hear the first word of Christ's teachings. It would be hard to find anywhere in the world people more free from the influences of modern civilization or from touch with the Western world. There is unusual natural capacity for the development of strong Christian character, however, among both the Chinese and the wild tribes. The latter seem in a providential manner to have been isolated thus far from all Western influences, so that the gospel messenger might have the first chance to give them the message of life before their minds became distracted

with other features of Western civilization. As one notes the strenuous efforts of the French to pierce through the mountains from the South with their railroad, and of the merchant from the East to blast a channel up the Yangtse so that his steamers may navigate safely and rapidly this waterway and tap the rich re-

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sources of the West, and as one further observes how the Chinese themselves are boring from the east through the mountains to thread a railroad into the province that they, too, may exploit the land, one realizes that the marvelous opportunity to win a land for Christ is rapidly passing.

Note further some of the conditions which cause this province to present so powerful an appeal to Baptists



A Suspension Bridge

just now to enter in and win it for Christ. As compared with other nations or other parts of China the people are remarkably approachable, and welcome the gospel. They seem to be without prejudice against the foreigner and his teaching. They have not been as yet distracted by commerce or other objects for which the foreigner often visits China. They have met only a few Christian missionaries and have formed their opinion of foreign peoples from them. The result has been a very different attitude than maintains almost every-

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where else. This condition cannot, however, last long. The message that the foreigner now brings is novel and greatly attracts the people. They think with wonder of the outside world, and this very best gift of the outside world comes with freshness and appreciated value. Wherever the story of Christ is told to-day it draws the people as it might have drawn them in other parts of the world centuries ago. Many are ready to believe with simple faith. Such an attitude cannot long remain, in the face of the new influences coming in to draw the mind to other things.

A splendid work has already been begun. Profiting by the mistakes in mission work in the past, the early missionaries to this province builded better than they knew. They have laid solid foundations for a fine educational system on which those who follow may build. The West China Union University, which is a model in its plans, and which should stand for many years at the head of the entire educational system of the province, has already been opened at Chengtu. A union system of schools makes possible a wide-spread unity and uniformity of Christian education such as is to be found nowhere else in the mission field. Four missions, including the Baptist, have a single superintendent for all their schools. In a land like this, where the government educational scheme has practically been valueless, it is possible for the educational missionary who thinks in terms of Christianity and not in terms of denomination to establish a system of education that shall supply Christian teachers for the schools, and, through the youth of the land, build up a Christian nation here in the heart of China. Christian men who can teach, well versed in Christian pedagogy, and capable of serving as superintendents of education on broad constructive lines, may find a scope for service which will make the ordinary opportunity of an educationalist in America appear small and trifling. The very best men that our universities can furnish may find a task which will try their metal in measuring up against these openings.

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In evangelistic work also a commendable beginning has been made, but the home churches have failed to appreciate the extent of the province, the magnitude of the undertaking, or the demands of the hour. This land is so far from the well-known parts of China that it has been thought of only as a small part of China, instead of as a great nation making its demands upon us for the gospel.

Strategic points have been occupied. Stations have been opened in great centers. The territory has been carefully studied before entering, and the interrelation of work has been considered in a scientific and broad way. As a result, the responsibility for the territory has been finely divided among the different denominations, so that there is no duplication and each has a large and definite responsibility for certain districts.

The burden thus falling upon Baptists and clearly recognized is oppressively great. Our missionaries have been wisely located in the capital, Chengtu, where, together with others, they are sharing in the Union University enterprise and are preparing to enter upon evangelistic work in a most needy and important section of the great capital. Four days to the



Chapel at Ningyuanfu

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west, at Yachowfu, Baptist workers are the only ones who occupy this border city, on the direct road to Tibet, and the key to millions of people, both Chinese and aborigines. Fifteen important outstations, of from 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants each, have been opened within reach of this town, while four days' journey over the mountains brings one into the midst of hundreds of



Bible Class at Yachowfu

thousands of people who are waiting in darkness for the gospel, and upon Baptists rests the responsibility to give it to them. This is indeed an outpost of medical work. One may travel south to Burma without finding a Christian doctor, except one missionary physician at Ningyuanfu. One may wander west through Tibet, and on into eastern Asia, before medical skill is found to relieve suffering. And if one goes north, one can scarcely de-

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cide where in Siberia or western Russia such skill may be found. Standing in the doorway of the mission house at Yachowfu and looking west, north and south, one is compelled to cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" What wonder that Openshaw and his faithful wife, alone in the midst of the danger of revolution, refused to leave these people, to whom he stands, in a sense, as the only Saviour they know?

One hundred miles to the southeast, but about four days' journey, is Kiatingfu, which is shared with other



Munroe Academy, Suifu

missionaries, but the eleven outstations, which are occupied by ourselves alone, represent, as do most of the outstations in West China, from ten to fifty thousand people each. These are easily reached up and down the river, and whenever the missionary can visit them he is met by crowds — all work is dropped and attention is given to the most important thing, his message.

Suifu, which was the first mission to be opened by us in West China, and which is now the third city in size in the province, is surrounded by some forty towns which have been opened as outstations and where more or less work is being done. Many of them have chapels, maintained by the people while waiting for a mis-

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sionary to come and help them use them. In many of these towns are groups of native Christians who have but a glimmer of the truth and sadly need teaching, in order to become strong and useful Christians, and in turn lead others to Christ. What can they do, however, without preachers, with a visit from a missionary scarcely oftener than once in two years or more? The openness of mind and the deep desire of these people for Christian teachers is an appeal that would powerfully move many in the home land if they could but really face it.

Twelve days' journey through the mountains from



Hospital at Yachowfu

Yachowfu brings us to Ningyuanfu, where a station has been opened and where Baptists stand all alone in the midst of a vast tract of country inhabited by millions of people still without God and without hope.

In all these five centers we have a small but noble company of workers who are bravely doing their best. Each one is trying to do the work of many, however. The openings for work,—the demands for help, rather,—have compelled them to open a theological school in Yachowfu, a boys' school in Kiatingfu, an academy in Suifu, girls' schools in Kiatingfu and Suifu, and hospitals in Yachowfu and Suifu. There is a loud call for much more. A boys' school should be opened in

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Yachowfu. A Bible woman's school is greatly needed, and further help in organizing educational work in the outstations and in preaching to the masses the simple gospel for which they wait. What is needed is men of strong faith and strong physique, for the life is not easy. Touring in the outstations is not characterized by luxury. The demand is for men and women who will be willing to undertake hard things. There are deprivations to be faced. There is isolation and loneliness. The missionary is far removed from the common comforts of life, as they are called. The daily newspaper is unknown, but he reads eagerly a paper from Shanghai a month old. Nevertheless, many substitutes are found for things which in the outside world are deemed necessities, and there are wonderful compensations that make this work especially attractive to those who enter upon it at the Master's bidding. Men leave this field with the greatest reluctance, and even when in peril from revolution and in physical danger, they withdraw only at the bidding of the consuls and with the greatest unwillingness. These are things hard to explain, but no man, with the love of God in his heart, can visit this wonderful country, without feeling strongly the great privilege which is given to some to labor here, and he is moved with envy rather than pity for those who give their life to this service. There are needed men and women, first-class teachers and educationalists, men with the gift to make plain the simple gospel of Jesus Christ and to teach others how to make it plain. Men with medical knowledge and the ability to teach it to others are also needed, who will teach the spirit of Jesus at the same time that they relieve the unspeakable physical suffering which is so wide-spread through this portion of the world. When the Master lays it upon the heart of one of his servants to serve him in this outpost of great honor, let such a one beware how he refuses to obey. May the churches, too, clearly understand their share in this great responsibility.



Lolos of Western Szechuan