

MISSIONARY STORIES N^o. II.



A Little Chinese Godson.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

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A LITTLE CHINESE GODSON.

PEKING is the capital of China, and stands at the northern end of the great plain of Chihli. If you leave the city by the south-west gate, and do not get stuck in the quaking bog which does duty for a road just outside the gate, you will find yourself on the old high-road which leads to the south. The traffic on this road is now far less than it used to be, because of the new railway which runs to the south-west, past Pao-ting-fu, Ting-chou, and Shun-te-fu, into Honan, and so down to Hankow on the great river Yang-tse. But in old days there was a great deal of traffic on this high-road. Some of the villages are really composed of nothing but inns; the towns through which the river passes owe their past glories to the days when people learnt of their existence by having to pass through them; and the road itself, if never more than a cart-track in quality, was more like a high-road than it is to-day, in width, in bustle, and in its crowded life.

However, though its glory has long ago departed, the road is still there and will still take us through the same places. We shall still skirt the western wall of the "Southern Park," and we shall still wonder why it is not kept in better repair. We shall still wonder where all the sand comes from which makes it so hard for our mules to drag the cart along, and we shall still rejoice when, on the third day, we leave the sandhills behind us and find ourselves crossing the "Pure River" at a place called Hsiung-hsien by means of a newly restored and

very picturesque bridge. The whole scene is now different. For sand we have water ; the road, instead of running along a depression between banks of sand, is now on the top of an embankment which has to be repaired every summer ; bridge after bridge has to be crossed ; until at



PEKING, FROM THE WALL NEAR CH'IRA MEU GATE, LOOKING SOUTH-EAST INTO THE CHINESE CITY.

length we reach Mao-chou, once the home of the great drug-fair, which has now transferred itself to Ch'i-chou, and a place of many memories, which are all too rapidly being forgotten to-day amid crumbling walls and empty inns. From Mao-chou we continue our way still

southward through a country neither of sand nor water, but of a rich, good soil, with the promise of the realisation of abundant crops. A hundred miles or so from Peking, after three days or thereabouts in (or out of, if we can walk) our Chinese cart, we reach the inn-village of "Seven-mile stop." This is a stopping-place some seven miles north of the large city of Ho-chien-fu. It was here that, in 1878, the year of the great famine, the two English clergymen who were then at work in Peking, came to distribute famine relief. The district was sorely in need of such relief, and when one of the Missionaries had to return to Peking, the other, the Rev. W. Brereton, went farther south to a little village seven miles the other side of the city of Ho-chien-fu, and distributed relief there also. This village rejoices in the name of the "Flowery Dragon Inn," because here an emperor once rested during an Imperial progress through the country; but to its own inhabitants Lung-hua-tien is more usually and familiarly known as "Borlor-dearh," if I may try and spell it as it sounds. What this second name means I do not know, but in itself the village is hardly worthy of such a grand name as Lung-hua-tien, or Flowery Dragon Inn; though it is pretty enough in summer, when the trees are in leaf and the weather is fine and sunny. Mr. Brereton came back again the following spring (1879), and spent some time instructing a few of the villagers who had expressed a wish to learn the doctrine, and in the year 1880 eight or nine of them were baptized.

The leading man was a rugged peasant-farmer named Li, then about forty years of age. He sent his daughters to school in Peking, and also his only son, Tsun-lan. The latter grew up not unlike his father, though I doubt if he will ever be quite so striking a figure; and when the time came for him to leave school he had made such a good start at learning to be a printer that it was decided that he should go on with that trade instead of

returning home. In the year 1895 the Mission in Peking was able to start a little English printing-press instead of



MR. LI.

using the native method of cutting wood blocks, and Mr. Li Tsun-lan was put in charge of the printing-press.

Mr. Li having now got a position and an income of something like four shillings a month, was in a position to marry; and, of course, his father was anxious that he should do so. I do not know who made the arrangements, but I fancy that his sister and his cousins, who had all been at the same Christian school, must have had something to say to it, as it was arranged that he should be married to one of their favourite schoolfellows. The Bishop was very willing, and was able to let Mr. Li rent one of the little cottages belonging to the Mission, close to the printer's shop and to the church.

In due course a little son was born, and to him was given the name of "Valuable Brightness," and he soon became the joy of his parents' heart.

The printing-press had in those days as much as it could do to keep pace with the work that the Bishop wanted done, and Mr. Li proved himself an invaluable man. Under him there were three other old schoolboys, who acted as compositors, and occasionally, I fancy, they used to get the rough edge of his tongue when anything went wrong. But, on the whole, things were going well, and I do not think that Mr. Li himself, and I am sure that no one else, suspected what a great trial was coming upon him and his wife in 1900.

When the Boxer movement broke out in Chihli, those who were in Peking felt quite sure that it would never spread into the city itself, however it might grow in the country districts. But as time went on we felt less secure, and by the time that the Rev. H. V. Norman and the Rev. C. Robinson, of the Church of England Mission, had been killed at Yung-ch'ing, we began to be really anxious about Peking. Our Christians wished to know what they were to do for the safety of their wives and families, and as at first it was repeatedly stated that under no circumstances could they possibly find protection

in the Legation, we advised them to make their escape, if they could, to the houses of heathen friends or relatives, where they might have a chance of lying hid until things quieted down again. Mr. Li accordingly took his wife and child to the house of a friend in Peking, who offered them a refuge.

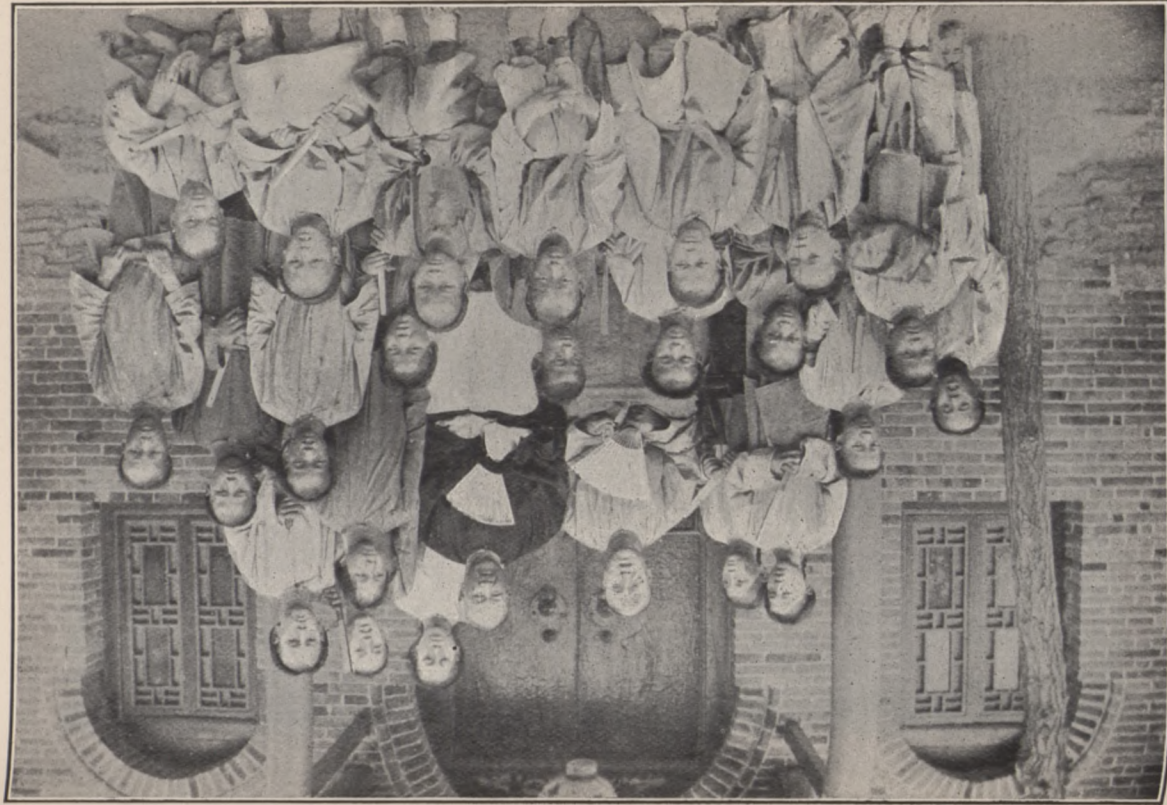
On June 13 the storm burst, and the Mission premises were destroyed the next day. Several of our Christians



THE REV. H. V. NORMAN.

perished during those first days, including one of Mr. Li's compositor boys; but he and his family remained in safety at his friend's house. However, the friend got frightened, and urged Mr. Li, for his sake, to profess himself no longer a Christian. It is easy for us in England to say that he ought not to have done it; it is harder to realise the strength of the temptation. There was his duty to his friend, not to bring him into trouble

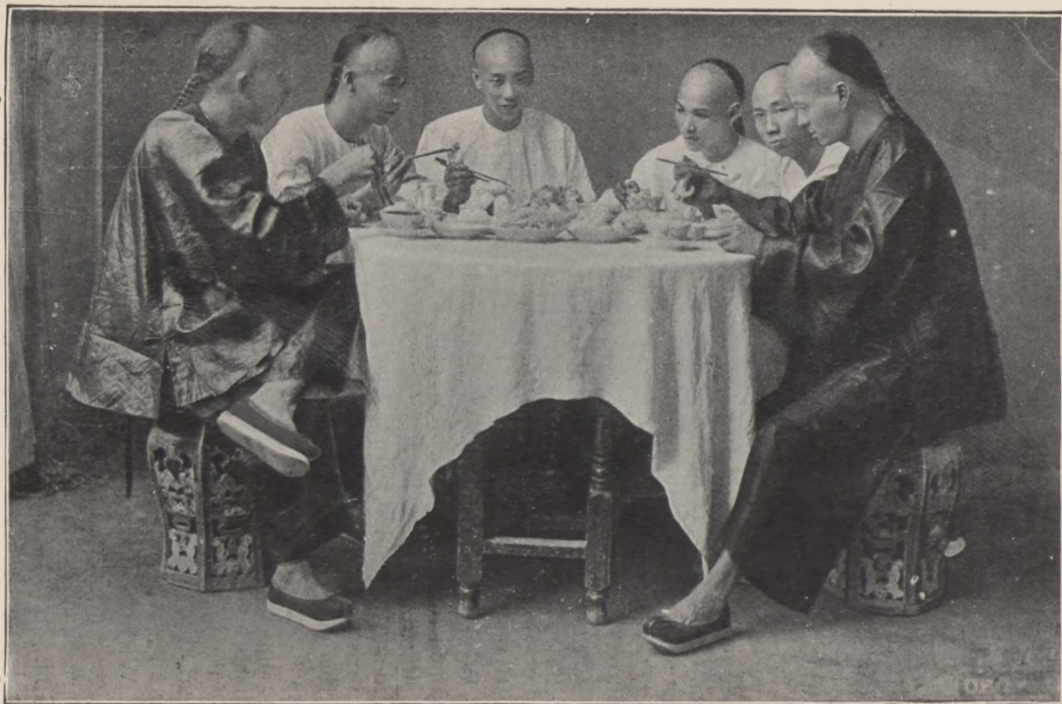
if he could avoid doing so; there was the natural wish to protect his wife and child; there was the doubt if there would ever again be any missionaries or any church; and there was the excuse, so ready under the circumstances, that he need only deceive his enemies for the time—that in his heart he did not mean to go back on his Christianity, and that surely a little deceit was justifiable. It seems to me that we must remember, in thinking of these things, that it was not as though there were others near him



standing firm, or as though there were others to condemn what he did. I cannot help thinking that he must have felt very lonely indeed, and that the only chance of helping his friend, of showing his gratitude for that friend's protection, lay in doing what he asked. I do not mean that it was not a sin; but it does seem to me that we, who have not known the same temptation, are a little too apt to judge without sympathy, forgetting how often we too, in other ways, have "denied our Lord."

So it came to pass that Mr. Li was saved with his wife and child, and soon after he was able to get away out of Peking, along that high-road which I have described, to his native village of Lung-hua-tien. When he arrived there he found his father and the other Christians in great trouble and perplexity. No one knew what was going to be the end of the trouble, and the local Boxers, who had been friendly to our Christians, were beginning to find that the other Boxers were looking upon them as half-hearted, and they were therefore urging the Christians to "conform," in order to avoid trouble.

The fact of the matter was that it seemed a pity to the friendly Boxers that all their efforts to protect our Christians should now be thrown away by the obstinacy of the latter. At the first outbreak of the trouble they had promised that the Christians of the Church of England Mission should not be molested; the Roman Catholics, whom they hated as often interfering in lawsuits, etc., and in other ways not behaving like quiet citizens, were to be prosecuted; but our Christians were to be let alone. On one occasion, when some Boxers from elsewhere had come to the village, and had threatened to destroy the church and loot the property of the Christians, the local Boxer leader had actually executed two of the men for daring to touch the "protected" church. But now his action was being called in question, and he was not strong enough to stand out against his allies. The simplest



A CHINESE BREAKFAST, EATING RICE AND DRINKING TEA.

way out of the difficulty was that the Christians should pretend to "conform," and then the trouble would be at an end. One man from each family was to go to the Boxer temple and burn incense—that was all.

It was just the same thing as in Peking, but there was this difference—Mr. Li Tsun-lan had already conformed once, and it seemed easier the second time. He had sinned once to secure safety, and it seemed more excusable to repeat the sin than to have sinned for nothing; It was his influence which turned the scale, against the prayers and tears of his sister, who had until he came been able to restrain her father from giving way. His sister—a truer, stronger Christian—refused to be protected on such terms; and so, with two little cousins who were fond of her and felt they could trust her, she went out into the fields, and hid there, getting food from home at night, but running a daily risk of capture and torture. The rest of the family enjoyed this dearly won protection until the troubles were past.

When that happy time came Miss Li was able to return home; and then, instead of scolding her brother, or despising him, she set herself to move him to a true repentance, and she succeeded. In telling you this I am not drawing on my own imagination, but repeating what I know Mr. Li would wish me to say. He has often said that it was his sister's influence which first made him see how wrong he had been; and then God Himself in His love laid His chastening hand upon him. His little son Kuei-ying (Valuable Brightness) fell sick and died. This put the seal to Mr. Li's repentance, and he became an altered man.

When he came back to Peking in 1901 he asked me to give him something, anything, to do, so that while he earned a livelihood he could feel that he was also serving God. But all our printing plant was gone, wrecked or stolen by the Boxers. So I suggested that he should try

if he could help in the dispensary in Peking, and this gave him the opportunity that he wanted. On Sundays he would try and teach some of those who came to our church, and during the week he was content to work on as a dispenser under a Chinese doctor but little older than himself. It was not always easy for a man who had for some years been a master-printer with boys under



SAMUEL.

him, but he did it as cheerfully as he could and without grumbling.

It was while he was thus employed that God gave him what he felt to be a sign that he was forgiven. Another little boy was born to him, and he and his wife determined to call him Samuel ("Asked of God"), and they did me the honour of asking me to be his godfather. From the first little Samuel has thriven wonderfully, and, though his parents have now a second boy also, Samuel remains

their particular joy, because he was to them the sign of God's forgiveness.

My godson was not very old when the opportunity for which we had been waiting came, and it was at length possible to give Mr. Li some work of his own as a catechist. We wanted to put a man at Ch'i-chou, to begin the work there, and he seemed obviously the right man to send. So the Bishop gave him his license as an acting catechist, and he and his wife and Samuel took up their residence at Ch'i-chou. There they have lived ever since, and Mr. Li has done much good work, both in preaching the Gospel and in healing the sick, as far as his power goes.

While I was at home in England on furlough in 1906, having been invalided with a bad leg, I received the following letter from Mr. Li, as nearly as I can put it into English :—

“Letter to the Rev. F. L. Norris from Mr. Li Tsun-lan.

“With all respect to the priest, Mr. Norris, greeting.

“Your pupil has not written to you for three or four months, and you must have got home by now and seen your beloved mother again. I wonder if you had a peaceful voyage, and how your leg is now. We here have remembered you every single day, and I hope your leg is much better. On the 30th of the second month Dr. Yang came to Ch'i-chou from Ho-chien and brought me your gift, the photo of the Mission group in Peking. Many, many thanks for thinking of me. On the 25th of the third month the Bishop came here and brought me my white surplice, and how can I find words to thank you for that? Mr. Partridge accompanied the Bishop on this visit, and one man was baptized and three catechumens were admitted. The Bishop returned to Peking on the

26th, and on the 28th I went to An-ping, a village some fifteen or twenty miles away, where there are some men preparing for holy baptism, and where we wished to put up a little room and a wall round our bit of land. The adherents there were all glad to help, and not one of them would take any wages for his work. So in five or six days it was all finished satisfactorily. On the 11th of the fourth month I returned to Ch'i-chou, and here we four [i.e. himself, his wife, and his two children] are, all well. The two children have nothing whatever the matter with them, so please do not be anxious about them. My father hopes that we shall all come home this summer, including my sisters from Peking and from Pao-ting-fu, as it is three years since we have all been at home. But I cannot yet say for certain if I can get away.

"Please, Mr. Norris, pray for us, and ask God to help His servants to preach the Gospel in all this Ch'i-chou and An-ping district, so that there may be real and lasting fruit, and not merely leaves. I feel that I am so unable to preach as I ought.

"Please give my humble respects to your honoured mother, and accept the same yourself, from your pupil,

"LI TSUN-LAN,

"(With every token of respect)."

Such a letter as this will, I think, give a better idea than any words of mine could do of the man, and of his work, and of the spirit in which he tries to do that work. But, as this little sketch is, perhaps, wrongly called after his little son, and not after Mr. Li himself, I must add a translation of the letter which the "little Chinese godson" wrote to his godfather at the same time, by the hand of his father, but in his own words for the most part.

"Letter from Samuel Li, aged Four, to his Godfather.

"Your godson Samuel asks after his godfather's health.

"I am always hoping that you will come to Ch'i-chou, but now I know that you can't come now, because I asked my mother, saying, 'Why does not the priest come?' and she said, 'He has gone home.'

"I want to tell you something—how my father, when he went to An-ping this time, took me with him. We stopped there half a month, and I was not home-sick a bit, and did not run after my father at all, because there were a great many boys who played with me, and they all liked to play with me very much. The people of the village were always asking me to take my meals in their houses, and I liked doing so very much. Their cakes are all kinds of colours; some are black, some red, and some the colour of meat. I always took my picture-book to show them, and there were always a great many people round me, looking at my picture-book or listening to me talk; it was just as if a man with a monkey had gone there. They none of them wished me to go. When they were building the house I always wanted to help—do odd jobs, carry bricks, mix the mortar, and so on. I wanted to do all these things, but my father never would let me, and said I was no good! But I am strong and well, and I eat plenty. Only, my face is as black as an African's, because I was so much in the fields, playing with those village children, or working, weeding, or gathering fuel or grass, or searching for blackbeetles. I came home on the 11th, and saw my mother and my little brother, and he gave me a hug and a kiss, and I am very fond of him. This is what I have been doing with myself, and I am sure you will like to know it. I wonder how your leg is, and when you will be able to come back here. I have told my father a lot more, but he won't write it down, and says it is nonsense. My mother asks



MISSION SCHOOL BOYS : PRETENDING TO TAKE A PHOTOGRAPH.

especially after your honoured mother, and after your health, and so do I.

“With respect, from your little godson,

“SAMUEL.”

There is not much more to be said about my little godson. But, if I may, I want to ask all those who read this little story to think sometimes of this work which is being done by Mr. Li in the parts around Ch'i-chou and An-ping, in the province of Chihli, in North China. I want them to realise that this is part of the work of the Diocese of North China ; that the way to help it is to help the S.P.G. to send out more missionaries, to train more catechists like Mr. Li to work in other places, and to bring up more little Christian children like my godson Samuel in the knowledge and love of God.

And I cannot help thinking that Mr. Li himself, perhaps, sets some of us an example. He had sinned, and his repentance was real ; it bore and is still bearing fruit ; *it made him keen on doing Missionary work*. It may be that as we read about him we shall feel that though we, too, have often sinned, our repentance has not as yet borne such good fruits, and we shall forthwith determine *to do more for Missions than we have done hitherto*, in order to show our gratitude to the Father, Who has forgiven us so many sins, to our Saviour, Who loved us and died for us, and to the Holy Spirit, Who is ever at hand to help us to grow holy.

God grant it may be so.—F. L. N.

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