



CHINA INLAND MISSION

Suancheng, Anhwei, China,

March 20, 1934.

Dear Friends:

The picture at the head of this sheet illustrates two of the things that have taken up much of our thought since the last circular, things in which God has wonderfully answered prayer for us personally. Our wedding, and our travels. Although, on October the 25th, Betty did *not* step into a sedan chair, but merely walked out of the house of her parents into the garden to be married, still, everybody knows that a sedan chair in China very often means a bride and a wedding. And as to the travelling, since we came to Suancheng, we've had our share of riding about the country in sedan chairs.

It came about in this way:—Perhaps some of our friends at home would prefer a boat, or a train, or at least a car in making a general survey trip of our field-to-be, Tsingteh and vicinity. There may be some who would advocate packmules, rickshaws, or even wheelbarrows for such a trip. But to all these worthy suggestions one can only answer one thing: It could not be. No one but a man could walk a narrow little path, the main highway, that follows the in-and-out curves of clear mountain streams and the up-and-down curves of grassy hills, of mountains wooded with pine and bamboo. Sometimes these mountains rose up all around us, blue layer upon blue

layer of them, and sometimes there seemed hardly room for both a foot-path and a little bubbling stream to squeeze between them at the bases.

Our purpose was to visit our new home, Tsingteh, and the other places which are to be under John's care. The district has not really been evangelized, although years ago good work was done in parts of the field. In Miao Sheo, Kwan Yin Chia, and Changhna there have been and are groups of Christians; but Tsingteh itself, with high old Chinese house made over for us, and preaching hall on the street in front, has no church yet and only one or two believers. Yet it is an answer to prayer just to have the property, rented and "fixed up" with screens and other foreign contraptions; when we remember that in the old days anti-foreign feeling ran so high that no foreigner could rent without provoking a riot.

In those days, too, the missionary family, travelling from place to place, could hardly get lodgings for the night—I don't mean hot and cold running water and electricity, of course, but merely a shelter and place to spread one's quilt, and ordinary kindness, in the form of being provided with hot rice and tea and warm water for washing.

Whenever there were Christians in a village, we knew we would be welcome to stay in their homes as long as we liked, and such hospitality! As we were travelling most of the month of February, and Chinese New Year came about the middle of the month this year, we got in for the best of all the delicacies and "New Year's Specials" which keep the women busy months before to grind, fry, store up, and bake, and which the whole nation takes two weeks off to enjoy. Yes, after certain idolatrous ceremonies to appease the ancestors and all gods which might otherwise be offended, China's Millions, being unable to work during the Big Holiday, strut around in new clothes, incessantly eating peanuts and the kernels of melon and

sunflower seeds, and ready for anything amusing to turn up. Passing through a typical wayside village, we see a mass of new blue backs huddled over the gaming table—there are the men gambling in the streets. The women are probably gambling within, and gossiping, and playing with their adorable, dressed-up babies. On every street door, closely barred from within, are newly pasted fresh-paper-and-paint door gods, and euphonious mottoes. Upon every outer wall is pasted red paper as a flimsy basket for holding sprigs of evergreen, bamboo, and lighted incense. Great bunches of incense, with offerings of food, smoulder before every newly-painted old couple of gods in every street shrine. Within doors, one may catch a glimpse of the red tapers lit before the tablets of the ancestors. Every where is red, tinsel, gilt (mostly paper, soon to fade and tear). The streets are littered and pungent with bits and smells of fire-crackers and incense, and more "popping" may be heard in the neighbourhood.

This is all that China has to take the place of Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and Easter. We mean the *real* holidays, as the Christians of the world celebrate them in their hearts, and not the commercialized national traditions of the same.

Tsingteh is a pathetic-looking city, set in the valley among splendid mountains. Pathetic from without, because it has a large, rambling city wall, and comparatively few houses, but acres of overgrown tangle, vegetable garden, and mulberry orchards where people used to be. Pathetic from within, because you see in closer view the crumbling ruins of wealthy palaces, and the broken bricks piled up like stones for the walls of poor people. This country was almost entirely depopulated during the Tai Ping Rebellion, ("Mighty Peace") and here are the crumbling palaces of the proud Chinese nobles! Some blamed these troubles upon the fact that in one place the city wall rears up into a corner resembling a turtle's head—unlucky omen, but too late now to change.

All that is left to remind us of some proud old families, whose representatives used always to attend the Emperor, are the ancestral temples, features quite common to Central and South China where pride of race and blood runs deeper and higher than in the more mongrel North. There can hardly be a doubt that this pride of race is the greatest barrier raised against missionaries and against the gospel in China. Even the humblest of Chinese men is not afflicted by inferiority complex. But He who dealt with the Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, has, we believe, also chosen out for Himself some rare jewels in Southern Anhwei. It is only to help our Lord reach His own that we came to China at all, not because we thought we would be able to convert this "stiff-necked" race by our personalities! Not that we *choose* the Chinese ways of thought and life; but that Christ, through a system of open and closed doors, if not by thundering directions from heaven (a thing He could, nevertheless, do, and might do again) sent us here. And, being here, it is by His grace alone we *stay* here (another thing entirely). Otherwise, who could endure such small annoyances as.....?

John walked all the way, some 200 miles in all; while Betty rode in the chair until she got tired, and then walked. We had two men along to carry our bedding, clothes, books, and some food supplies, each man trotting along, balancing equal burdens at each end of a springy pole. About once an hour, the procession would halt at a "10 li stop", which might be the largest inn in a prosperous town, or might be just the Li-Family-Tea-Shoppe-Ice cream-Parlour-Mack's-Hot-Dog-Joint-or-what-you-will-in other words, just a mud hut, from which a rude shelter spread over the path of highway, to the gratitude of all travellers who stopped to smoke and rest and order up a bowlful of boiling water and tea leaves. Depending upon the location and the time of day, we would soon move on again, or stop to eat what lunch we carried, or order something hot and savoury. And always there would be an audience. At "10 li stops" John often sold many

gospels, the cheap, bright covers of which caught the eye of holiday crowds; and seized many opportunities to speak to the whole crowd or to a fellow-traveller on the road about the True God and Eternal Life. At night, after we had settled down in an inn and had our supper, we could always count on a crowd to listen to the Words of Life.

Mr. and Mrs. Warren, who expect to go on furlough before the summer, have been living in Tsingteh for about a year, and it was they who rented the premises and made over the house for us. Mr. Warren met us before we came to the first group of Christians (called an outstation), and personally conducted us all over the field, with a week in Tsingteh itself. He and John had meetings in the evenings with the Christians, and in the daytime, accompanied by the Christians, would go into the villages round about. In the village squares and homes they held meetings, with scripture verses and posters to make clear to the eye what was not made clear to the ear by reason of the foreigner's accent and general lack of vocabulary. Betty had her opportunities with the women and children indoors.

The general course of our trip might be likened to a rough baseball diamond. In other words, we went to Tsingteh (South of Suancheng) by a south-westerly route, and returned from Tsingteh by a different route entirely, taking in an eastern point, over the border into Chekiang Province.

When we say, "over the border", we mean it literally! The country became more and more mountainous, rice fields being entirely crowded out, and there was little for the local people to live on but corn, grown apparently up for miles on precipitous slopes. We continued up the trail until we reached the pass, and then we went "over the top," and nearly tumbled down into the next Province.

In this mountainous country is a great cause for thanksgiving and continued prayer: an indigenous church, started with little help from outside some thirty years ago, when the school

teacher Ch'eng bought some gospels, and later a whole Bible, from a travelling colporteur. Ch'eng and his son went to study this doctrine with the C. I. M. missionary of the district at Hweichow, and were there baptized. And since then the church in their own home has grown, and the son is a preacher helping one of our fellow workers in another district of Southern Anhwei. The group of Christians gathered around old Ch'eng who loves to sing hymns, but it would be hard for other Christians to recognize either words or tunes. They sing their own Chinese tunes; and even their local speech is enough to frighten a poor missionary who has *just* been starting to be able to understand and be understood by his fellow-men! But we feel that this work at Changhua is the most encouraging in our field, and, God willing, we should like to go "over the border" again, stay longer, and acquire enough of the terrible dialect to preach the gospel in many, many villages and towns of those larger mountain valleys, and even in the smaller hamlets perched all in around, and among the mountain slopes.

Praise items:

For help in language study (John finished his Second Section before the wedding), and in all details of the wedding.

Also for health during last summer's heat, and for health and protection during the trip in February.

Also for the encouragement in the lives of some Christians in both Suancheng and Tsingteh districts.

Also for opportunities of getting out into the country districts preaching the gospel, and for many young men who have come here and heard the word.

Special items for prayer:

For guidance in making all future plans regarding moving to Tsingteh, and for journeying mercies.

For Chinese Christian helpers. There are no "spare" Bible women to help Betty, and, humanly speaking, it seems more than necessary to have one. Pray for Evangelist Lo who is to be John's helper.

Pray that suitable servants may be found.

Pray that God will glorify Christ in our lives, and make us spiritually effective.

Thank you all for letters, and for your prayer help. We'll try to write more frequently in the future.

Yours In His Happy Service
Betty and John Stam