

LETTER XIII.

THE CHRISTMAS CONFERENCE.

BY a happy coincidence the new departure for our China Mission, like that for the Methodist Church in America, was made at a Christmas Conference. The time fixed by Bishop Marvin for the ordination of the native preachers was December 24. They were promptly on hand from their different fields of labor at Soochow, Karding, Naziang, and other places; and the exercises of the meeting began on Friday, December 22, in a praise-meeting in the church near the mission-house in Shanghai. The native preachers, the children from the boys' and girls' schools, and some native Christians, with the missionaries and visitors from America, constituted the first congregation. The singing, while of course in Chinese, sounded very familiar, on account of their using the same tunes with which we are so familiar in America. This was the first Methodist congregation I had seen every one of whom was supplied with the Hymn and Tune Book. By the help of the organ and the singing of the school-children the whole audience readily entered into the spirit of the praise-meeting, joining heartily in the worship. When they sang "Rock of Ages," "There is a fountain filled with blood," "I need thee every hour," "The Gates Ajar," "Jesus loves me," "I am so glad that Jesus loves me," "Come, Holy Spirit," and many other familiar hymns, the visitors would

join in often, although they had to use the English in place of the Chinese words. A prayer-meeting led by Brother Parker followed, when many earnest petitions were made for the presence of the Holy Spirit during the Conference.

In the afternoon the Quarterly Conference of the missionaries was held, when they made reports from their several fields of labor, and the superintendent of the Mission, Brother Lambuth, made his official report to the presiding Bishop. The report was quite full, giving the value of each piece of property, number and state of schools, the general state of the work, and especially the character of the native preachers. There are six of these, and as so much depends on them in the future of the work in China, a natural interest was felt to know all about them. After a full and candid discussion of their fitness for the work, four of these were elected to deacon's orders, and two of these four were also elected to elder's orders. Brothers Fong and Tsung, who were not elected to deacon's orders, were not recommended, because they were not sufficiently advanced in their studies. They are excellent men and good preachers, but it was deemed best to use much discrimination in conferring the important office of deacon or elder upon those so recently idolaters. No mere enthusiasm influenced the election of these men to orders. It was a great event, on which the Church might well congratulate herself that there had been raised up men in this heathen nation to whom could be given authority to administer the sacraments and to expound the Scriptures. But it was remembered that this authority should be cautiously conferred, and each candidate's case was well and carefully weighed before action was taken. The length of his Christian life was considered, the style and manner of his preaching, his own character for stability and integrity, his firmness in time of trial

and persecution, his personal habits of life and study, and even, as at home, his family were also taken into account; and then, with all these facts before them, the brethren voted to elect them to orders. The wife of only one of the six is not a Christian.

Of the four elected to deacon's orders all are married save one, Brother See. Thus we pronounce his name, but it is really Sz. Perhaps he may induce some one to share it with him, strange as it is. He is about twenty-four years of age, was educated in a Presbyterian school, is a very fine singer, and promises to be an efficient preacher. He has already had considerable experience, as all our native preachers hold a number of services each week. Brother Dsau and Brother Dzung were elected to elder's orders. Both have been preaching a number of years, and are fine men and good preachers. The former was in America several years, and speaks English quite well. His American name is Charles K. Marshall. He has been preaching at Soochow for several years. He is thirty-one years of age, and of fine personal appearance. Brother Dzung has a good mind, which has been trained to think, and he is really a capital preacher. In our extremity for lack of funds he was employed by the Presbyterians for several years, and they gave him a good training. He is thirty-eight years of age, and his wife is a very energetic Christian woman, and has charge of a girls' day-school, which she manages well. The only difficulty in his case is a weak voice, too severely taxed, perhaps, by the four or five sermons a week, which he has been preaching for several years. The other candidate for ordination to deacon's orders was Brother Yung, the first person Brother Lambuth baptized in China. He is a man of deep piety, a fluent speaker, but of less education than the others. He is a carpenter by trade, and when

the Mission could not employ him he worked at his trade and preached when he could. He is some forty-five years of age. He alone of the preachers has a heathen wife.

Saturday, December 23, was observed as a day of fasting and prayer, with special reference to God's blessing upon the ordination of the native preachers. Brother Lambuth had preached the night before on the Holy Spirit's presence, and all appeared to be much in prayer to that end. While we were yet calling the answer was given. In the afternoon the native Quarterly Conference was held, with Brother See as secretary. After the preachers had made full reports about their preaching-places and schools, Bishop Marvin addressed them, through Brother Lambuth as interpreter, telling them of the importance of the new duties which would shortly devolve on some of them as ordained ministers. He told them that no other six preachers throughout the whole Church stood in such important relations as they who were laying the foundations of the Church in China, and who would naturally give tone and type to Christian life here for hundreds of years to come. Any mistakes which they might make now would do far more harm than if they were made in the remote future, when the Church was better established. He said that he desired to pray with them before their ordination should take place. While he was pouring out his soul in a prayer of great tenderness on their behalf and of most earnest supplication for the future of the Mission, all hearts were moved by the conscious presence of the Holy Spirit.

Brother Allen, after great effort to command his voice so that he could speak at all, told them how that Jenkins, Taylor, Kelley, Wood, and Cunningham, had all looked forward to that hour when a Bishop should be present to ordain native

preachers, and, turning to Brother Lambuth, recounted the noble work of the superintendent of the Mission in all these years of anxious and arduous toil, which was at length being crowned with God's signal blessing. After a fitting response from Brother Lambuth and some remarks from one of the visitors, who sought to express the Church's appreciation of the work of her faithful missionaries who had not faltered in all these years of neglect and trial, Brother Yung tried to speak, but could only utter two brief sentences for his tears, and after remaining some time on his feet in the endeavor to say more, sat down, overcome with his emotion. We could not understand what he said, but we saw the tears of Chinamen mingling freely with those of Americans, as all our hearts were melted by love to a common Saviour, and we fully comprehended their spirit, although we could not understand their language. Brother Dsau then, with broken utterance, told, in excellent English, his great joy at this eventful hour, and his purpose of a fuller consecration to the work of the ministry. We all then joined, two in English and the rest in Chinese, in singing with overflowing hearts, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." Brother Yung preached at night on the miracles of Christ. The chapel, as on every occasion of evening service, was densely crowded.

The Sabbath was a beautiful day. Native Christians from other Churches were present at all the services, as if to congratulate our members on this eventful occasion. After reading the fourteenth chapter of John and the distribution of the elements as usual at a love-feast, the native Christians began to speak, and continued to testify promptly until the time had expired, their remarks being from time to time interspersed with appropriate verses of familiar hymns. The following transla-

tions of a part that was said will show the character of the experiences given:

Brother Dsau said: "We have met to-day according to Christ's appointment. I am glad to be here. I feel that I need much more of the love of God and man in my heart. I want to live nearer to God from this time on. I will not say much now. I beg an interest in your prayers, that I may be faithful unto death." Brother Fong said: "Before I heard the doctrine of Jesus Christ I was ignorant and in the dark. But I am glad that I have learned the way of salvation. I trust in Jesus, and hope to gain a home in heaven. I hope you, my brethren and sisters, will pray for me, and help me to do the will of my Saviour." Brother Yung said: "I am glad to meet you, brethren and sisters, in the love-feast. I am trying to serve God, but I am very weak. I am like a little child amid many and strong enemies. I ask you to pray for me, and assist me, that in the dangers and trials to which I may be exposed hereafter, I may stand and overcome all my enemies, and with you all gain a home in heaven." Brother Tsung said: "Before I heard the gospel I did not know true happiness, but since I believed in Jesus I have experienced great peace and joy in my heart. I love Jesus, and know he loves me and will save me. Trusting in Jesus, I hope to gain a home in heaven. I hope to meet you all there. I ask you to pray for me that I may be faithful." Brother Dzung said: "Before I heard the doctrine of Jesus I thought I was very wise and good. I did not think I had done any thing very wrong or wicked. But when I heard the gospel and believed it, I began to feel that I was a very great sinner. But I trusted in Jesus, and obtained the pardon of all my sins. I trust in the grace of Jesus, and want to do his will. I ask an interest in your prayers, that God will help me to do his will." The old sexton said: "I am

weak, very weak, but I trust in Jesus, and by the grace of God I am what I am." An old Bible-woman said: "I have been trusting in Jesus for many years. I know that he loves me. Before I heard the gospel I worshiped many idols and false gods; but I am glad that I have learned to worship the true God and my Saviour Jesus Christ. I pray every day that God will bless his Church and add many to it."

Many others spoke, but these are sufficient to show how alike is Christian experience in China and America.

After a sermon by Brother Allen, on "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" in which he sought to impress, from Peter's history, the need of self-distrust and of unshaken stability, four native preachers were ordained deacons. When the words were spoken, "Take thou authority to read the Holy Scriptures in the Church of God, and to preach the same," each preacher received a separate copy of the Chinese Bible, which might serve alike as a remembrance of this hour, and be, jointly with his parchments, the badge of his authority. The ordination of elders and the administration of the communion took place in the afternoon. During the interval after morning service, the Sunday-school for the street-children was held, in which the poor children of the vicinity were gathered in the chapel, and were taught to commit to memory verses of the Scriptures. The school-children serve as teachers, and are thus preparing for greater usefulness. The Chinese habit of learning every thing *memoriter* makes it quite easy for one child to repeat a verse until another shall be able to recite it. They all shout out at the top of their voices while they are thus learning their lessons. Studying aloud seems to be almost a necessity in order to catch the different shades of meaning of Chinese words according

as they are variously pronounced. It is common in all Chinese schools. The two elders were then ordained, the important parts of the service, as in the morning, being first read in English and afterward in Chinese. All the American preachers present, being elders, assisted in the laying on of hands at the ordination.

The communion service followed, Brother Lambuth administering it in Chinese to the American and Chinese ministers present. Some English-speaking Christians being present, one of the American visitors was called upon to assist in distributing the elements to the mixed circle of Caucasians and Mongolians that bowed at the table of the Lord. It was a peculiar pleasure, not simply to bow together with these Christians of diverse nationalities, but to break to them the emblem of the Saviour's passion and death. There were several tables of communicants, all, with ten exceptions, being once worshipers of idols. The services were naturally of the most solemn and intense interest. The labors of the Sabbath were closed with a sermon at night by Brother Dsau, on Galatians ii. 20, "The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The audience was large and attentive. As in all the preaching we have heard in Chinese, frequent references were made to parallel passages to illustrate and confirm the meaning of the text.

This morning we had a Christmas sermon from Brother Dzung, one of the newly ordained elders. The hymns were admirably selected, and the lesson was the second chapter of Matthew. The text was from the fifth chapter of Micah: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The sermon was about forty minutes long,

and while I could only understand the words "Jesus," "Jerusalem," and *pefong*, the Chinese word "for example," or "by way of illustration," I hardly removed my eyes from the preacher's face during his entire remarks, which, as I am prepared to learn, were admirable, being well matured and showing great clearness of thought. A few final words from Bishop Marvin, interpreted by Brother Lambuth, in which he expressed his deepening love for the Chinese Christians, closed the exercises of the Christmas Conference. Of course, through our inability to speak the language, we held far less communication with these converts from heathenism than we otherwise should have done. But every opportunity was employed when we had an interpreter to find out about their Christian views and experiences. They invariably expressed their great joy at hearing the story of Jesus, and their gratitude to those who had brought them the good news. A great many called to see Bishop Marvin and myself, and almost always brought some simple present, as an expression of their gratitude at the interest we had shown in coming from America to visit the Church in China. Their Chinese cards would always be attached to the gifts, which we prized no less than the gifts themselves, although these were often rare and interesting articles. Two of the native Christians walked from Naziang on Sabbath morning, a distance of sixteen miles, to witness the ordinations. We certainly had every reason to believe in the sincerity and earnestness of these Chinese disciples of Christ.

A part of the experience of this memorable week in China was not on the programme of the Christmas Conference, and yet is inseparably associated with it. The regular monthly Missionary Conference of the laborers in Shanghai was held on Thursday evening, the 21st instant, at Brother Lambuth's.

The question discussed was the encouragements and discouragements of missionary work in China. The views of ten or more of those present were given, and the interesting exercises extended far into the night. The opinions expressed were perhaps none of them new to us, and yet we prized them as confirming views already formed after much deliberation. Encouragements were found in the facts that some of those present came to China thirty years ago, when there was only a single convert, while there are now twelve thousand, aside from many already dead; only one or two cities could then hear the gospel, while it is now preached in over a hundred walled cities, besides five hundred villages, and heard, especially in the country, by crowded audiences; and missionaries might go anywhere in the interior without fear of violence. The people labored among are a reading people, and far in advance of many other heathen nations to whom the gospel has been sent. They are usually eager to get tracts and other publications, and to pay for them, showing that they buy them to read, and will preserve them. While becoming converts to Christianity more slowly than other nations, yet great progress had been made, and it promised to be of a permanent character. The very vastness of the nation was an encouragement, for it overflowed into other lands, and if converted would carry the gospel everywhere. The schools have already done much, and will accomplish greatly more. A Christian atmosphere is being created where missionaries have labored for much time, and in such numbers as to impress the community. The spiritual life of the people, while often like that of those recently converted from idolatry, whom Paul rebuked in his Epistles, would give place to what Paul prayed for in behalf of the Corinthian and Ephesian Christians.

Discouragements are found in the impressions

made by the Catholics that Christians are seeking to get control of the government, and that in some quarters Protestants, who are confounded with them, are supposed to have political designs. The Chinese move so slowly at best, and are so fixed in their habits of thought, that they have to hear preaching a number of times to understand really the drift of it. They love to hear foreigners speak Chinese, and their respectful manner is often due to that fact, and some time passes before they are really set to thinking by what is said. Great harm is done by the presence of foreigners who are confounded with Christians because coming from Christian nations, and yet whose lives are notoriously profligate. The number of Eurasian children in China is very large.

The opium trade has not only done much to debase the people, but to set them against all foreigners. This very day, while enjoying a walk on the "bund," I noticed opium hulks, or stationary ships for the sale of opium, closed like other foreign places of business, and gayly decorated with evergreens, as if in honor of the birth of Christ, and to celebrate the usual festivities of the season. Of course discouragement is found in the occasional impure life, and even open apostasy, of a professed convert. But the most serious difficulty is the impatience of the Church at home, who add to the other embarrassments of the missionaries by constantly demanding large and speedy results. More members could be secured and reported were the laborers so unwise as to yield to this pressure without taking into account the reaction that might come from forming Churches in a large measure of persons with vague notions of what religion is, and without much character for stability. Not so did Christ labor. "His fan was in his hand." He winnowed men, scattering even more than gathering. He might have reported large multitudes of disci-

ples, but was really content with a few who might be so fixed in their purpose as to influence for good the whole future Church. The Gospels, no less than The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, have new significance when read in a heathen land.

During this Christmas Conference several interesting young men called to see us, whose history is rather suggestive. They were being educated in one of our schools, which we had to suspend some three years ago for lack of funds, when they were transferred to a school connected with the Episcopal Mission, where they are now being educated for the ministry. They have the most grateful recollections of our interest in them, and wanted very much to remain with us, but could not for the reason indicated. Thus we lost twelve valuable young men at one time, because the Church at home failed to send the necessary funds to carry on the school. Our missionaries have thus accomplished great good that does not now appear in the statistics.

But is it not high time that we should stop asking for bricks without straw? Our attitude toward the China Mission for many years has been that of solemn trifling. The first vital interest shown in the work for a long time dates from a very recent period. The most interesting province of the eighteen provinces of China, that which contains nearly the densest population and the largest literary class, is the Kiangsu, where our Mission is located, and we are the only Methodists in the province. If we mean business, let us rally to the support of our noble missionaries here, and send them such reinforcements as that we shall have a Chinese Conference. Then only shall we be doing any thing like our part for the redemption of the millions of this empire. We start to-morrow on a tour of inspection to important points in this province and others.

I cannot insist too strongly on the necessity of an increased number of laborers, in order to accomplish large results at an early day. Much of the success in Japan is due to the fact that missionaries are there in such force as to deeply impress the minds of the people, while China has not one missionary, either male or female, to a million of her population. Where the largest results have been secured is down about Foochow and Amoy, where the laborers are most numerous. At first they waited from ten to fifteen years for a single convert. Now there are several thousand native Christians in the immediate vicinity of these two cities. The watchmen on the mountain tops are so near to each other that they can see eye to eye. You can go nowhere near either city without finding foot-prints of missionaries, and most frequently their dwellings, announcing that Christianity has made its home in the country as well as in the city. With a dozen faithful men in one mission here in this province we should be able to do large things for the Master. We must not expect one or two men to do any thing at once. The leaven in small quantities takes longer to leaven the whole lump. The Sandwich Islanders, fifty thousand in number, were Christianized by the labors of twenty missionaries at once. Bishop Marvin is persuaded that we cannot afford to enter Japan, but that we should concentrate all our missionaries in this part of the world on our field in China. It is the Church's last great campaign, the taking of China in the name of Christ. That accomplished, the work of the world's redemption will be completed. The conversion of the four hundred millions of China, fully one-third of the human race, demands the united energies of the Church of Christ. Happy are we of the Methodist Church, South, in sharing in this work.

Shanghai, China, Dec. 25, 1876.

LETTER XIV.

TRIP TO SOOCHOW AND HANGCHOW.

THE Chinese have this saying, to express their admiration of these two great cities, "Above is heaven—below are Soochow and Hangchow." They are both Fu cities, which rank next to Kiung cities, like Peking and Nankin. Next to Fu cities are Shien cities, of which Shanghai is one. The almost universal mode of travel in this part of China is by water. The whole country is intersected by a net-work of canals, fed for the most part by water from the Great Lake. These canals are full of choice fish, and help to solve the important question of means of subsistence as well as transit.

On the evening of December 26 our fleet of three house-boats, commanded respectively by Superintendent Lambuth, Mandarin Allen, and Expectant Parker, each manned by four or five boatmen, slipped their moorings near the mouth of Soochow Creek, in Shanghai, and moved westward into the interior. The three Missourians were together, and the hitherto unchristened boat received the fitting name, "Missouri." She is less than thirty feet long and eight feet wide, and is divided into two rooms, one twelve and the other six feet long, with a common height of six feet. The contents are three beds, two tables, a stove, a clock, several chairs, book-shelves, wash-stand, mirror, and other things