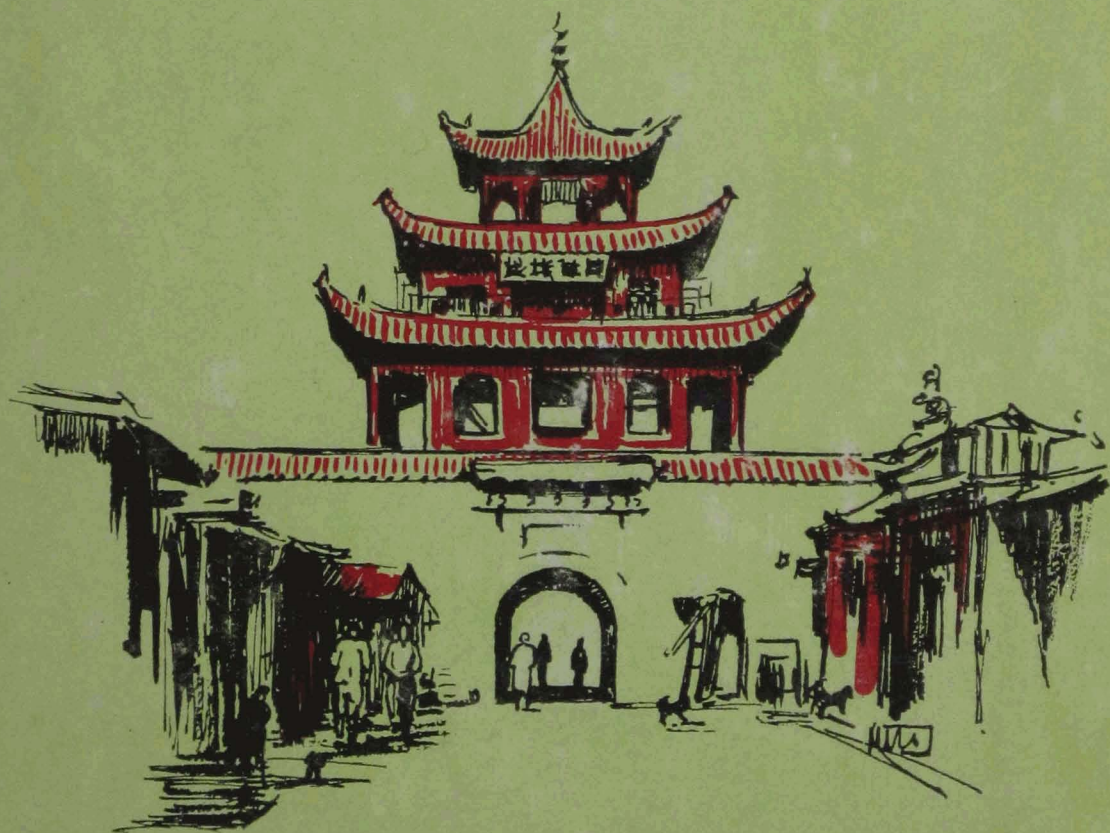


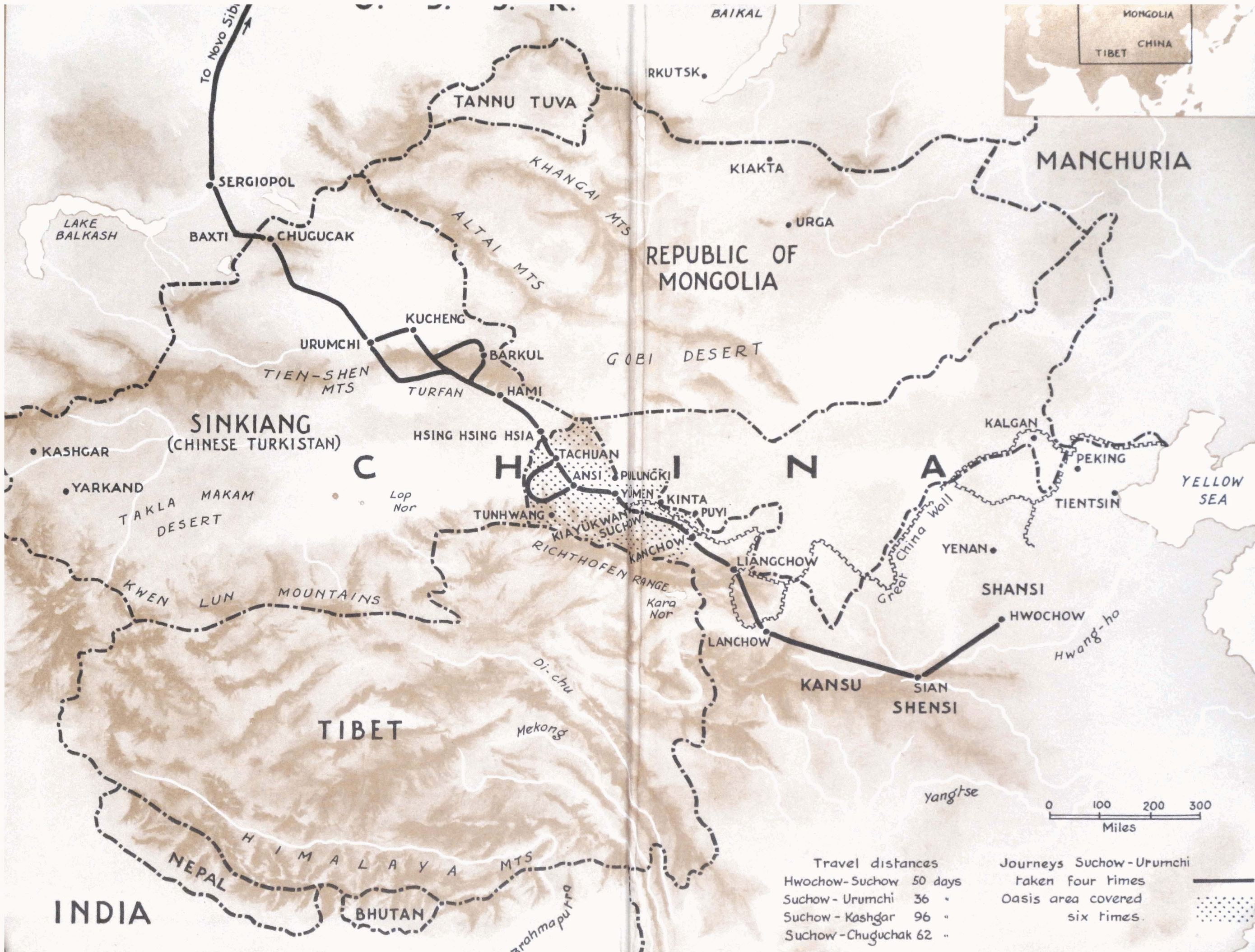
THREE WOMEN

**MILDRED CABLE
FRANCESCA FRENCH
EVANGELINE FRENCH**

The Authorised Biography by

W. J. PLATT





SINKIANG
(CHINESE TURKISTAN)

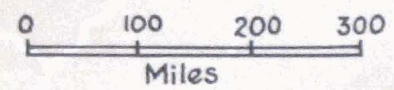
C H I N A

TIBET

INDIA

Travel distances
 Hwochow-Suchow 50 days
 Suchow-Urumchi 36 "
 Suchow-Kashgar 96 "
 Suchow-Chuguchak 62 "

Journeys Suchow-Urumchi
 Taken four times
 Oasis area covered
 six times.



YELLOW SEA

MANCHURIA

REPUBLIC OF MONGOLIA

G O B I D E S E R T

TAKLA MAKAM
D E S E R T

Great China Wall

H I M A L A Y A M T S

ALTAI MTS

KHANGAI MTS

TIEN-SHEN MTS

KWEN LUN MOUNTAINS

RICHTHOFEN RANGE

Di-chu
Mekong

Arakmaputra

yangtse

Hwang-ho

LANCHOW

KANSU

SIAN
SHENSI

SHANSI

YENAN

TIENTSIN

PEKING

KALGAN

KIAKTA

URGA

RKUTSK

TANNU TUVA

SERGIOPOL

BAXTI

CHUGUCAK

KUCHENG

URUMCHI

BARKUL

TURFAN

HAMI

HSING HSING HSIA

TACHUAN

ANSI

PILUNGKI

YUMEN

KINTA

PUYI

TUNHWANG

KIAYUKWAN

SUCHOW

KANCHOW

LIANGCHOW

NEPAL

BHUTAN

MONGOLIA
CHINA
TIBET

To Novo Sibirsk

BAIKAL

LAKE BALKASH

KASHGAR

YARKAND

Lop Nor

Kara Nor

YELLOW SEA

YELLOW SEA



Mildred Cable

Evangeline French

Francesca French

THREE WOMEN

MILDRED CABLE, FRANCESCA FRENCH,
EVANGELINE FRENCH

The authorised biography
by W. J. Platt



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

Copyright © 1964 by W. J. Platt

First printed 1964

**Printed in Great Britain for Hodder and Stoughton Limited,
St. Pauls House, Warwick Lane, London, E.C.4,
by Cox and Wyman Ltd., London, Reading and Fakenham**

TO
ANN MARY
AND
ROBERT JAMES
IN
THE HOPE THAT ONE DAY THEY MAY HAVE
AS MUCH JOY IN READING THESE PAGES AS
I HAVE HAD IN WRITING THEM

CONTENTS

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION	<i>Page</i> 9
ALL ABOUT EVA	
1. Eva in Geneva	11
2. The Sick Man of Asia	19
MILDRED AND FRANCESCA	
3. Enter Mildred Cable	32
4. The Human Material of a Church	37
5. Two Become Three	44
6. The Laughing Trio	51
CHINA IN REVOLUTION	
7. The Republic	56
8. A Waking Giant	59
INTO THE HEART OF ASIA	
9. Russia Looks East	69
10. The Old Silk Road	74
11. 'Something Happened'	81
12. The City of Kanchow	85
13. On the Fringe of the Desert	90
SUCHOW	
14. Gossiping The Gospel	93
15. Three Women in the Ministry?	99
16. Finding The Way	104
THE GOBI DESERT	
17. The Bitter-sweet of a Desert Journey	111
18. A Wall of Spears	116
19. Gathering Clouds	122
20. The Story of 'Little Lonely'	127
21. A Thousand Buddhas and A Crescent Moon	132
22. Homeward Bound	141
23. Paradise in a Chinese Colony	148

BANDITS, BRIGANDS AND CIVIL WAR

- 24. Image and Impact 157
- 25. The Winds of Change Become A Breath of Fury 163
- 26. The Escape 167

LAST YEARS IN CHINA

- 27. The Willow Cottage 174
- 28. Sixty-seven and Not Out 181

RETIREMENT BUT NOT RETREAT

- 29. A Diary of War Days 189
- 30. To The Antipodes and India 196
- 31. 'The Work of the Humble' 203

Addendum from my Recent Mail 211

Index 213

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

The Three Women were well known in those parts.

'Their description of Central Asia was the best and most brilliant I have ever heard,' said Peter Fleming.

A grey-haired Living Buddha from Mongolia remarked: 'Of course, I know about these three women. They are unmarried, they travel everywhere teaching their religion and doing good.'

'Why did they leave Russia?' asked a Prince in Turkistan. 'Wasn't it Russia? England? Where's that?'

This book is about Evangeline French, who started it all, Mildred Cable, who joined her, and Francesca – Eva's sister – who couldn't keep away. They spent twenty years working within the Great Wall of China and another fifteen on the old trade routes which lie beyond it, living among the oasis peoples of the Gobi Desert: Tibetan pilgrims, Chinese merchants, Moslem adventurers, and just ordinary people. The first European women to face such journeys, they travelled during days of revolution, the reign of war-lords, and the Asian clash of the world's two rival ideologies. Eva almost lost her life in the Boxer rising, Mildred was kicked unconscious by a tired mule, and all three were held captive for weeks by a young brigand chief. During their wanderings they were joined by a fourth person, a little deaf and dumb Mongolian beggar-girl, 'Topsy', who now lives in London.

To their surprise, as a result of their travels and writings, they were awarded the Livingstone and Lawrence Medals, and were received by the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

Their books reached a wide public, but it has been thought that such activity merited a new look in a wider setting. In attempting this at the request of their friends, I have, of course, drawn on their letters, their own writings, on my personal friendship with them over twenty years, and on a certain amount of hitherto unpublished material. A visit to China which I made some years ago has also helped.

Miss Alice Gaunt has paid the price of typing the many drafts of this manuscript and it is doubtful whether without her help, the book would ever have been completed. My thanks are also due to the Rev. W. H. Hudspeth, and to Col. Fox-Holmes for valuable advice, as to many friends of the Trio, including of course, the officers of the China Inland Mission, for their warm co-operation.

ALL ABOUT EVA

I—EVA IN GENEVA

WHEN Evangeline French sailed to the Far East, she found the land to which she went just awaking from a long sleep. The city in which she had come to womanhood had been well awake. If China was almost a closed land, Geneva was open to every new-fangled idea and ideal which Europe could conjure up. True, its roots went deep into history, and it was steeped in theology, but it also offered a home for utopias and internationalisms, exiles and eccentrics of every variety. As a student in her teens, Eva French, in a small way, became a symbol of Genevan life.

To begin with, Switzerland itself lies at the centre of Europe—a continent which has produced the most dynamic civilisation the world has seen, and in the Swiss Federal Constitution, liberty of conscience and belief, stifled over half our globe, were long ago declared to be inviolate. Ever since the meeting in Geneva of Gorchakov and Beust in 1869, Russians, Austrians, Germans, French, British, Americans, had gone there to talk. Founding his Marxist organisation in St. Petersburg in 1883, it was to Geneva that Plekhanov had escaped, followed by a whole bunch of Russian revolutionaries: Dentsol, Axebrod, Vera Sassul, Sassulitch, Ignatov, who actually lived there when Eva French was a student . . . They were stirring days. Plekhanov, who had played a large part in the early development of Lenin was later joined by him in Geneva.

This remarkable city had also made a home for John Calvin, who, in the sixteenth century, founded its Academy and its Library. It was the birthplace of two famous books: the most popular of early translations of the Bible into English, and the *Social Contract* of Jean Jacques Rousseau in French. So it was a place of contrasts, even contradictions, for amongst others Zwingli and Gibbon, Voltaire and Knox, had at various times settled on the shores of its beautiful lake. The Geneva opera house ranked for size, at any rate, with that of Paris. In its old University I have seen modern youth hanging on the words of a visiting lecturer, Karl Barth, whose theology shook every divinity dovecote in the western world. So they came: artists, littérateurs, musicians, anarchists, atheists,

revolutionaries, refugees, as well as men of God. Geneva was Europe's 'Hyde Park Corner', and if you were sweet sixteen, as was Eva French, it was rather heady.

She came with her family, who had lived at Medea, in the Algerian foothills of the Atlas Mountains where she was born and where her father seems to have owned a small estate; in Bruges, Belgium, where Francesca was born; and at St. Omer, in north France. Some years later they were to move to Portsmouth. It was a nomadic *ménage*, restless, detached, yet strangely evangelical and Victorian, its roots in religion rather than geography. There were four children, and their parents were first cousins, John Erington French and Elizabeth French being son and daughter of two brothers. Their father had been born in the Chateau of Guisnes in the Pas de Calais, their mother at the village of Farndon, in Cheshire. Proud Irish blood, too, ran in their veins – dating back for well over a century. Later, Nora, their elder sister, went to live in Ireland, and Francesca took some nursing training in Dublin. The family tree includes a duke and a bishop, and there were various Army connections. Eva once remarked that due to the family's many wanderings, they had all been 'dragged up', but this is not quite borne out by the facts. Nora, the eldest, was something of an artist, a pupil of Charles Condor, and a friend of George Moore, W. B. Yeats, Padraic Colum, and George Russell. At one time she lived with the Yeats family. Eva, too, had artistic gifts. Their mother was a woman of strong personality and some literary taste, and seems to have been the editor of a small periodical in Geneva. On the flyleaf of their family Bible, inscribed in a clear disciplined hand, are the names of them all, and within its pages lie three illuminated text-cards, each addressed 'To Mamma', from Nora, Eva and Francesca. A brother, George Erington French, had died in infancy in Algeria.

Their home was a place of healthy independence of spirit, and in its comings and goings appears to have been a cross between a restaurant and a dormitory. The girls were educated at the Ecole Secondaire, Geneva, and during their years there, the daily routine appears to have been rigid: breakfast at 6.15 a.m., school beginning at 7 a.m., lunch served at noon. Supper at 7 p.m. consisted, oftener than not, of bread, a large tureen of soup, with a baked apple to follow – concerning which Francesca once said: 'With schoolgirl appetites, we never criticised.'

The two sisters, Eva and Francesca, were like quicksilver and pale platinum: Eva a stormy petrel, Francesca a placid, poetic lamb. Indeed, the former was shut in the coal-cellar when the latter was

being born, and her first day at a convent kindergarten, at the age of six, had been quite an event. She had climbed the high wall surrounding the school, and resolutely refused to descend until bribed by a bar of chocolate, the truce—that there should be no victimisation—being argued across the intervening space between the nuns down in the school-yard, and the child on the wall. At St. Omer, where they lived before Geneva, there were moats, battlements, and old fortifications, all of which Eva, with her boundless energy, had explored in detail, while sweet, loyal little sister, Francesca, trailed on behind.

But life was not always amusing. Over the years, Eva became deliberately defiant, and punishment seemed only to put steel into her. Once a reputation for rebellion had been acquired, she found increasingly that it must be maintained. At their home in the Rue du Rhône, she risked her life on an unguarded fifth-floor window-ledge. 'I got out of that window,' she boasted later, pointing upward, 'and walked along to there, and then I came in by that window . . . The wall seemed to be pushing me down into the street all the time.' One winter, on the Quai des Eaux Vives, at midnight, and in a high wind, she climbed a narrow curved-topped wall, slippery with ice on the edge of the lake. 'I found glorious icicles there, better than anywhere else,' she said. She fell into the fire; tumbled into a village pond; cracked her head on a garden fence . . .

With such a temperament, to be a teenager in Geneva was very heaven—like a taste of wild honey. But Continental higher education had little time for sport, or for her kind of prank, so Eva, at this epoch in her existence, being something of an exhibitionist and taking a delight in being 'second to none', found that her restless energy needed to be channelled into school work. With her square jaw and the steely glint of challenge I have often seen in her eye, she set herself to conquer a new world. Early rising, punctuality, competitive, even aggressive, classwork became part of her day, but as is sometimes the case with people of action and decision, she was unsure of herself. In her inmost soul there was loneliness, a longing to be liked and, believe it or not, even shyness. She trusted neither life nor herself—so for Eva French, there was no peace. Perhaps, in a rather austere Victorian home, the trouble arose from some sense of unworthiness or inferiority. Activity was her defence mechanism; ready speech, communication, were difficult. At school, and later at the Geneva University, she became an avid reader and listener; but still, somewhere, deep down, she knew that there was an empty place.

On Sunday, many British residents in Geneva would worship at the Anglican Church in the Rue du Mont Blanc, others at various Protestant or Reformed Churches. Eva and Francesca knew more French than English, for they had never lived in England, and they worshipped at an Evangelical Church and received regular Bible instruction in its Sunday school. For Eva, church services were unreal, empty, remote from everyday life. During the week, she could dance until daylight, or work till midnight. At public lectures, and amongst the heterogeneous collection of visitors who came to their much-travelled home, she was all ears and ideas. Stories about Russians exiled to Siberia moved her to indignation, and though they kept much to themselves, the groups of Russian exiles resident in Geneva were a source of interest and speculation. In more recent days, *Izvestia* itself has recalled those Siberian camps, where food consisted of bread, wheat-mash three times a day, oat-porridge once. 'We got thinner from day to day, our bones began to stick out, but we *had* to extract that damned gold,' said a prisoner . . . So books about revolution attracted Eva. Even extra-mural theological lectures in the University were grist to the mill of her enquiring mind, for amid the maddening maze of things, she was unconsciously seeking for a clue to life – a pattern, a meaning.

And those closing decades of the nineteenth century were indeed complex and epoch-making. There was the much discussed conflict between science and religion, and the emergence of what were called 'working classes', or the 'proletariat'. There was the overspill of European nations into Africa and the Far East, with the startling rise of Japan in Asia, and of Bismarck's modern Germany in Europe. Everywhere, new thought was becoming articulate, and as we shall see, this ferment of new ideas and new nationalisms, even revolution, was later to meet Eva French on the other side of the world.

Eva was living in a sort of fog. What was wrong with the world? Across the lake, the French nation still nursed vivid memories of its defeat in the Franco-German war of 1870. Russia appeared to be a nation of autocrats, serfs and exiles, who paid the price of their country's expansion with their life-blood. At the time, Russia, in her push toward South and Central Asia, was threatening Afghanistan, and what we audaciously called 'British India'. Had it not been for Britain being in India, that sub-continent might well have passed under Russian control. Pushkin, the national poet of Russia, had long ago sung: 'To the unshaken walls of China, glistening with its bristling steel, will not the Russian earth arise?' Already, Siberia

was the largest country in the world — three times the size of European Russia, and one and a half times the size of the United States. Europe was a jungle of power politics, with Britain and France quarrelling about the partition of Africa and the place of Leopold II of Belgium in the Congo. While Eva was still in her teens, events almost led to a European war, this time about British policy in the Near East, Continental nations forming a solid front such as had not been seen since the time of Napoleon. To the now sobered undergraduate, Eva French, the world seemed to be thoroughly unsatisfactory.

About this time she attended a social function of the English-speaking community in Geneva and found herself standing near to the English padre. What did he think of life? she wondered. Dare she speak to him? Taking her courage in both hands, she heard herself asking: 'How *can* one find satisfaction?' Though the chaplain may not have realised it, for Eva it was a *cri de coeur*. It may be that on a social occasion he was not prepared for so direct a question from so direct a young woman. It is possible that he himself was out of his depth. At any rate, he fell back upon the tabloid answer: 'Church services ought to help you, you know.'

Describing this period of Eva's life, Mildred Cable once spoke of the 'gloom known only to the young'. Certainly for young people who dream dreams, doubt and disillusion can mean anguish, an agony of the very soul.

According to her friends, these were days when Eva in her search was devouring Russian literature. Hersen had written that Western Europe was played out, that Socialism was to be to the new world what Christianity had been to the old. Soloviev, on the other hand, had dreamed of a world Christian community — a union of the Eastern and Western Churches and their peoples. But perhaps for Eva French, the clue was to be found in Dostoievsky, with his anguish over the sufferings of common humanity. 'It is not before you I am kneeling,' says one of his characters to Sonia, the prostitute, 'but before all the suffering of mankind . . .'

Of all the actors in the European drama which followed the turn of the century, the historian has written that Vladimir Lenin and Woodrow Wilson were outstanding and symbolic. Both at different times went to Geneva to talk. Both returned to their homelands: one in a sealed railway carriage, to be acclaimed publicly from the Kremlin as the infallible prophet of things to come; the other, with the plaudits of Western Europe ringing in his ears, to become a ghost which would haunt Capitol Hill and the American people for

a generation. Both had sought world government but of diametrically opposite types. For both, Geneva had retained its reputation for contrast and contradiction, and years later, the tragedy of a divided world became complete when Dulles of the U.S.A. refused to shake hands with Chou En Lai of China. That, too, happened in Geneva.

Before the French family pulled out from Geneva, Eva had two moments of real release. The first came when she met an American woman, fresh from the Far East, whose husband was convalescing in Switzerland after a serious illness, and who before her marriage had been a teacher in a girls' school in China. Happily for Eva, she was an understanding person, and could listen as well as talk. She spoke about the loneliness of women and their position in Asia; of concubinage, foot-binding, and cheap child-life in Shanghai, then a city of half a million population, destined to become six millions. Perhaps she spoke most of all about the need for somebody to do something to help Chinese women and children — something personal, direct, self-giving.* Eva French never forgot that conversation, for, like the Lady of Shalott looking out on a wider world, she too was 'half-sick of shadows'. She longed for the real thing — for her own fulfilment.

The second break, in a way, was quite different. It was the coming to Geneva, with its solemn-eyed religion, its cynicism, its gaiety, and aloof intellectualism, of that typically Anglo-Saxon institution, the Salvation Army. At first, like Paris, Geneva laughed at the bonnets and the braid, the flying banners and the beat of the big drums. The city was convulsed at the pidgin French spoken by the young lasses and lads from London. But when the bright young things began to hold street-corner meetings to talk about God, the limit was reached. Frowning, official Geneva said that this was illegal. Highbrow Geneva smiled sardonically. Gay Geneva began to throw brickbats to break up the meetings. Apparently, 'Hyde Park Corner' was all right, provided it functioned within four walls or in a mental institution . . . But Eva French saw it all and was thrilled. Here was something about which one could 'go over the top'. This was action, cheerfulness, social passion. This 'Army' was

* Even in 1920, the General Secretary of the Shanghai Y.W.C.A. reported that Chinese children accompanied their mothers to the textile factories when only infants. By five years of age they were regularly employed. Rows of baskets containing babies and children, asleep or awake, lay placed between the noisy machinery. Young children, supposed to be working but overcome by fatigue or due to absence of supervision, lay asleep in corners or in the open or hidden under raw cotton. A. M. Anderson, *Humanity and Labour in China*, S.C.M. Press.

doing something about the dregs of Genevan society, and had something to say about a peace within, which neither power politics nor disillusioned anarchy seemed to provide. Here was a pattern which, to those dedicated young cockneys, seemed to offer something worth living for. They took charge of the late-night 'drunks', found homes for unmarried mothers, jobs for the misfits, and, before long, a place for themselves in prison, for law-breaking. For Eva French, all this was good — *very* good.

Then to the French family came another thrill, though it did not last for long. Their father had decided that they must go to live in Britain, and the girls had never lived there. To youth, change is always an excitement, and so, with great hopes, they came to Southsea, Portsmouth. Soon Nora their elder sister, married Leslie Murray Robertson, and just over a year later, their father died, casting a long shadow over their home. But this was not all. Even in tiny St. Omer, in the Pas de Calais, there had been a Gothic cathedral, an ancient ruined tower, a Benedictine abbey and a large Roman Catholic college, but Portsmouth, chief naval arsenal of Great Britain, with forts and battlements on Spithead, was just a mean-looking navy town, dirty and ill-kempt. Of course, there was a pleasant water-front at Southsea, a 'Victoria Park' and a new Town Hall in Portsmouth which had cost a hundred thousand pounds. In St. Thomas's Church, there was a cenotaph in memory of an assassinated Duke of Buckingham. It was equally true that Charles II — who unlike the French family, had vowed 'never to go on his travels again' — had married Catherine of Braganza in the Garrison Chapel; that Charles Dickens had been born at No. 387, Mile End Terrace, that there was a ruin of an ancient inn called 'The Spotted Dog'. But where were the Conservatoire, the School of Art, the inspired music teachers, the sculptors, the artists, and the scintillating talk of Geneva? Here were slums alongside snobbery: provincialism, poverty, small-talk, and a 'pub' at almost every street end, but no lectures worthy of the name, no opera-house . . . There were sailors and their sweethearts, hemp stores, ships' chandlers, and docks measured by the mile, but after Geneva, the change left even placid Francesca, who had just left school, numb with disappointment. So this was England! It found Eva blazing with revolt against the complacency, the mean streets and the dull people. Victorian England might be a great power, with a fleet equal to that of Russia and France combined, but where was its soul? The Establishment ruled; the poor worked sixty and seventy hours a week.

Eva was twenty-one and an angry young woman, in revolt, as she later said, 'against the old order, the chaotic conditions of human society, the misery of mankind, the burden imposed on women, the horrors of the sweating system and the extreme poverty'. And now—more than ever—she was sure that somehow her own life ought to be involved. She could not stand aloof from it all; it was a rebuke to her humanity . . . She never quite got over that first winter in England, yet in her heart of hearts she knew that she had no solution—only a deep, dull rebellion.

The only person to whom she felt she could talk was her teen-age sister, Francesca. When they were alone in their bedroom, Eva would explode and at any rate find some relief. 'I am done with all this humbug,' she cried one day. 'If I could take upon myself the world's misery I *would*—and jump into the sea with it.' Francesca, quiet, still a bit awed, who had never talked religion to her big, rebellious sister, said simply: 'Eva, there is no need to do that. It *was* done long ago—on the Cross.' Eva had a good memory and that remark was also something which stuck—that in Jesus of Nazareth and the way of the Cross, somehow there had been a break-through for humanity; that in utter, self-giving love, man was linked with his brother-man and at the same time with God.

It was 1890, and two weeks later, with that bedroom conversation still in her mind, that Eva slipped into an out-of-the-way church in a poor quarter of Portsmouth, where a special mission was being held. There, perhaps for the first time in her life, she faced herself. Francesca's words were still ringing in her ears: 'It was done long ago on the Cross.' '*The Cross*,' she reflected. Here surely was a clue to life—*servicing others*; self-giving; sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Perhaps, too, she recalled some words from the Gospels: 'Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone.' That certainly described her own condition—'alone', self-centred, and she would remain so unless she became involved in life and maybe accepted a cross.

At that moment, Eva said later, she felt herself to be in the Presence of Christ. It was a new experience. She felt herself to be somebody new. Things seemed to fall into perspective. Her undisciplined self met its Master. In that moment of insight, like lightning on a dark landscape, she saw the chaos of the world, which for months had been a burden on her soul. It was lit by light from Calvary . . . So there *was* another Way. 'Like the ocean when a storm has passed,' wrote one of her friends, 'her restlessness gradually subsided, and there came a great calm: a peace she had never before known.'

Something within her had died and something else had come alive.' I knew Eva French for years, and I am sure this was no weak surrender. The strength of her will and her dynamic personality remained, but now it was disciplined, directed – no longer self-centred.

Little did she realise that her mountain-top experience had followed a fairly well-defined pattern, a path trodden by the footsteps of mystics and martyrs before her: a first painful purgative period of unworthiness and incompleteness, followed by the moment of truth and insight. Then out of the fog of self had emerged an illumination, coming from that Other-than-self, *God*. Finally, with the surrender of the will to that Light, there had emerged the unifying experience where human spirit and Divine Spirit are one in purpose, and in peace.

Eva went to see the vicar of the little church which she had visited. She became a member of the Church of England and the vicar set her to work. Her job was the visitation of people living in the meanest streets of Portsmouth – streets where some of the families lived in cellars, others in attics; where public houses were crowded with men, women and children; where the street-girls of a naval port plied their trade . . . It seems rather odd that this shy, rebellious young woman – like her Master before her – felt strangely at home with the people who had to live in such places. She was calm, even relaxed, and for the first time in her life she felt that she had something to give. The empty place, the aching void in her inner self was filled. She was even happy in this self-giving.

Perhaps in some odd moment she recalled words from one of those Russian authors, whose books she had so avidly devoured in her Geneva days: Dostoievski's Father Zosina, speaking to Alyosha, the lover of men: 'Humble love is a terrible power which effects more than violence. Only active love can bring out faith. Love men, and do not be afraid of their sins: love man in his sin; love all the creatures of God, and pray God to make you cheerful . . . You will bless life and cause others to bless it.'

2 – THE SICK MAN OF ASIA

DURING the years Eva had lived in Geneva, the decaying Turkish Empire – with distant origins in Mongolia, but now a buffer state between Russia and the West – was often described as 'the Sick Man of Europe'. Toward the end of the century, China, with its

decadent Manchu dynasty, and lack of national spirit, might have been called the Sick Man of Asia, and if Eva French thought on leaving Europe for the Far East that she was escaping from power politics, she was mistaken. There was a difference, however. In the Far East she was at the receiving end of what in the nineteenth century was sometimes called 'imperial glory', but which in the mid-twentieth century we call by quite another name. It was evident on arrival in Shanghai that she was not the first person from Portsmouth to get there – the British Navy had been there decades earlier. Indeed, from one angle, it was due to them that she could travel into China at all. It was also true that, thanks to Western imperialism in China, she almost lost her life a few years later.

But we must go back a little. In 1800 an imperial edict had been promulgated from the Royal Palace in Peking, prohibiting the importation into China of the opium drug – a trade which greatly benefited the profits of the British East India Company. In 1840 Britain actually fought China concerning trading rights, and two years later, on board H.M.S. *Cornwallis* at Nanking, a treaty was signed by which Hongkong was ceded to Britain, and various ports on the mainland of China were opened to British trade and residence – though in that particular treaty no mention was made of opium. In 1858 there was a second war with China, and Britain (this time joined by France) negotiated another treaty by which foreigners were permitted to live in China under the jurisdiction of their own national courts; Christian missionaries and Chinese converts to Christianity were protected; and wider trading permitted. This time opium traffic was legalised and taxed. All the Western powers were now fully aware of the growing importance of China as a field for the extension of their trade. France, Russia, and the U.S.A. concluded treaties, and in 1859, in order to insist on the letter of the treaties, a Western army actually marched into Peking. The humiliation of China, proud but poor, was now complete. Over the next forty years more treaty rights were granted to European nations, and the effete Manchu dynasty became detested by the Chinese themselves, while internal power was increasingly being centred upon the despotic person of the Manchu Empress Dowager – who hated the West and all its ways. Though the opium habit was looked upon as 'foreign smoke', it steadily increased, and the growing of the opium poppy in China itself became more widespread.*

It was therefore little wonder that, encouraged by the Palace,

* At the turn of the century, the annual value of opium sent into the Treaty Ports and through Hongkong was over £4,000,000.

anti-foreign feeling gathered momentum. Eva French had arrived a few years earlier, and being in Northern China, as we shall later see, she was to face the full blast of the reaction.

But other voices from the West were also speaking to China. Canton, in the south, had often been the home of revolt, and here other forces had long been at work. Amongst them an important place must be given to modern Christian penetration. Even prior to the Nanking Treaty, indeed as early as 1807, Dr. Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society had arrived there. One of his deep convictions was that amongst so civilised and so literate a people, a Chinese translation of the Christian Scriptures was an absolute necessity. He had taken with him to China copy of an old manuscript, discovered in the British Museum – probably the work of an early Jesuit* missionary – containing a harmony of the Gospels, Acts and some of the Epistles, translated into Chinese. For fifteen years, in Canton and Macao, Morrison laboured on the prodigious task he had set himself. In spite of difficulties, after completing the translation of the Bible (published by the British and Foreign Bible Society) he went on to compile a Chinese dictionary in six volumes, a Chinese grammar, and the translation into English of some of China's great classics. He also founded an Anglo-Chinese college.

A dramatic sequel to this cross-fertilisation of ideas and the work of Gutzlaff, Medhurst and other missionaries came in 1852. One Hung Hsiu Ch'üan, born in a village close to Canton, who had some knowledge of Christianity and its literature, raised the standard of Chinese freedom against the Manchu. He preached the brotherhood and equality of man, the equal distribution of land, and communal ownership of property. His efforts eventually led to the Taiping rebellion, which for many years remained a very serious threat to the dynasty, and was suppressed only by Western intervention. Again in 1895, K'ang Yu Wei, a Cantonese scholar, was associated in a reform movement with Timothy Richard, an English missionary, who drew up a programme of reform, ranging from Cabinet government to education and the construction of railways. The programme had a sympathetic reception from the young Emperor in 1898, but was suppressed by the Empress Dowager. Later still, another important event in China's struggle was the formation of the Kuomintang Party, whose founder was Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the son of a Chinese Christian farmer living near to Canton. Sun Yat

* Jesuit missionaries had considerable influence at the Chinese Court between A.D. 1600 and 1715.

Sen once declared that the awakening of China actually began when Robert Morrison translated the Bible into Chinese.

Dr. Sun Yat Sen's career is fascinating. Taught by a missionary, in 1892 he had taken a medical degree in Hongkong. Later, when he became a revolutionary leader, at one time he had a price of £100,000 placed on his head by the Empress Dowager. For a time he was a refugee in London, and while walking down Devonshire Street on his way to attend church with his missionary doctor friend, Sir James Cantlie, he was kidnapped and held prisoner for twelve days in the Chinese Embassy in London. The English people were startled that such things could happen, and Dr. Sun's release was finally effected after help from Dr. Cantlie, and the intervention of the British Foreign Secretary.

By this time the winds of change were blowing hard throughout China, so the Empress Dowager gathered to herself total power for a final struggle against Western ideas and ideals. In 1900 the Boxer Rising began. Starting in the north, encouraged by the Empress Dowager in Peking, it was headed by a secret society which practised a superstitious ritual designed to make its followers believe that they were bullet-proof. The movement was also supported by local feeling against Westerners who had often not hesitated to build railway tracks through family graveyards, plant telegraph posts on sacred ground, and gather, in Christian schools and churches, thousands of China's youth.* Even at the moment of the Boxer Rising, newspapers printed in Chinese Treaty Ports by Westerners were discussing the partition of China itself (African territory had been more or less divided amongst the Western powers between the years 1875 and 1900.

When the explosion came, Western residents in Peking were besieged in their embassies for two months, and the German Ambassador was murdered. Chinese people seethed with resentment against the 'foreign devils'. Many missionaries in northern provincial towns were caught, and with their wives and children were killed. Thousands of Chinese Christians perished and it was only by further foreign intervention that such events were brought to an end. The treaties had had the effect of making the Churches appear as partners in Western imperialism, though through educational and medical work, Christian missions had offered an outpouring of service, in the main unselfish, such as the Chinese people had never before seen.

*In 1858, eighty-one Protestant missionaries were in China. In 1889 there were 1,296. In 1853 there were approximately 350 Chinese Communicants. In 1889, 37,287.

Such was the confused political situation in which Eva French was now living. She served her apprenticeship as a missionary during a period when China was emerging in turmoil, weakness and buffeting from three hundred years of proud but solitary self-sufficiency. Between the Boxer Rising of 1900 and the year 1912, when China finally declared herself, under Sun Yat Sen, to be a Republic, Eva and her companions learned what it was to live through China's travail.

She had gone out under the auspices of the China Inland Mission, whose founder, Dr. Hudson Taylor, years before, had decided that its whole work must be a venture of faith. It became the largest Christian mission in China. It was interdenominational; its staff lived modestly, and their necessities—such items as travel costs, food, clothing, buildings, were to be matters of trust in God and in the voluntary gifts of like-minded people. Prior to acceptance by the Mission, specific training and actual experimental Christian work amongst people at home were essential.

When she actually disembarked in China, Eva found the three weeks of slow trekking by river junk and springless cart to be a real thrill. Day after day, week after week, with four other women and a man, who spoke excellent Chinese, she journeyed through the villages, mixing with Chinese country-folk in wayside inns, market places, farms, paddy-fields, and on river-craft. She felt a dawning love for these simple people and their country. There was dirt, disease, poverty, exploitation, obnoxious odours and weird beliefs (explained to the little company by their guide), but there were also quiet dignity, gentle courtesy, and signs of a highly developed culture. When at last Shansi Province was reached, Eva felt that she was no longer a stranger in a strange land. This was to be her adopted country.

Her work was home visitation and evangelism in the villages, and she began by engaging an old Chinese servant, who, happily, had many local relatives and friends. Clad in blue cotton clothes and felt shoes like any Chinese peasant woman, Eva rode on donkey-back beside her talkative companion over rough country tracks, and rarely did they spend a night in her home. More often than not, they slept in villages. Listening to the endless stories of Chinese family life and local country gossip was quite an education!

Months passed, and she became increasingly known as a sympathetic listener and wise counsellor. She made progress in the language and in her turn was able to share with the folk their problems, their joys, and the many tensions which life held for Chinese women

and their families. Later, she found that she could go alone, needing no companion or interpreter. Often, indeed, villagers would come to seek her out for her help, and gradually she began to feel that she was no longer just a Western woman, but one of them. In addition to meeting groups of kindly, honest folk, at times she mixed with opium smokers and loose-living women and stayed in verminous houses. Slowly – perhaps very slowly – the truth of her message and, indeed, the meaning of her life, began to make an impact. Some of her friends now met in groups to await her arrival, to hear her talk about women of the New Testament who had been the last at the Cross and the first at the tomb, when Jesus of Nazareth had paid the supreme sacrifice of a selfless love . . . And so the first seven years passed and the year 1900 dawned. A new Governor, known for his anti-foreign temper, had been appointed to the Shansi Province where Eva French worked, and frightening rumours ran through the villages. She began to sense a coolness amongst usually warm-hearted villagers. In some of her Christian friends, too, she detected a new note of caution in their conversation. Amongst others, she rejoiced to see developing the kind of spiritual courage she had longed to see, and for the most part, these kindly people were still gracious. One day, a farmer might jeer at her as she passed his paddy-field. On another day, a Mandarin would keep her waiting unduly long, or a labourer would fail to turn up to do the job he had promised. She made no effort to hide the truth from closer members of the little Christian groups she visited. Certainly, the storm was coming, she told them. In their quiet way, some would answer: ‘Yes, Teacher, we know.’ But did they understand, she wondered. To them, religion had stood for security – a sort of insurance policy against life. Would they understand the New Testament lesson that Christianity sometimes meant a cross?

We shall return to Eva’s own story later but as I write I have before me papers concerning her friends which she gathered from various sources, years afterwards. They contain handwritten notes, stencilled sheets, printed accounts, of the courage and sometimes the martyrdom of groups of Chinese Christians and European missionaries, Catholic and Protestant. One of her exercise books is headed: *‘Extracts from letters from Shansi, and a list of Chinese martyrs’*.

The storm broke in 1900 and from this bundle of records, the following are typical.

‘Our Province of Shansi remained fairly peaceful until the new Governor came in April. Then notices were posted in all the streets,

calling the people to join the Boxers and turn out the Christians, saying that the drought was heaven's punishment for receiving the foreigners and their teaching. Several Chinese Christians were robbed and beaten, and threatening language was used against the foreigners. Local Boxers commenced to drill in May, and notices were posted of what was to be done to us . . .

'In June, our local Magistrate told the people to have nothing to do with foreign teaching. Later, our house was attacked.

'At eleven o'clock we escaped by a small gate, and our hope was to move down to Hankow. It was a dark and showery night, and our party consisted of fourteen, with women and children Chinese and European. We took a donkey to carry some of our bedding, and walked through the night along a muddy path. Next morning, after a scanty meal, we managed to hire donkeys for some of the women, each donkey also carrying a child. The rest of us walked. After crossing a river, the donkey-man left us when we met a hostile crowd who had evidently been warned of our coming. They started to tear our clothing, and quickly stripped us of all except about two garments each, women and children alike. The sun was hot, and now we had no hats and most of us no shoes either. Then our attackers quarrelled amongst themselves, and most of our clothes were torn to shreds. Our Chinese colleagues in the party were treated in the same way, one being badly kicked and beaten. On our starting to move forward we were pelted with stones, blood sometimes flowing from our wounds. One missionary became unconscious . . . We entered another village and asked for water to bathe our wounds but could get none. We were told to move on again, but we refused to leave, and lay down in a sheltered spot for two hours . . .

'July came and before daylight we waded through a river and went on as quickly as we could, taking frequent rests, as the days were hot. Sometimes we would arrive at a village to rest, but we were made to move on, and even the pools where we wanted to get drinking water would be stirred up and made muddy. Young roughs would follow us, hurling mud, and urging us to move still more quickly. In this way we were driven on, constantly being hit by missiles thrown, until we reached a small town. We were in such an exhausted state that we sat down in the main street and told the people that we could not go on until we had rested and been given some food, for we had had none since seven o'clock the previous morning, and now it was five o'clock in the afternoon. They brought us two buckets of refreshing water and gave us a good supply of

cakes. After resting a little while we were escorted out to the main road, and a few miles from that place, a man who was a complete stranger gave us three dozen freshly boiled eggs, which proved quite a treat. Further on, we proposed to sleep in an open field, but about midnight some of the villagers came and moved us on to the soldiers' guard-house by the side of the road, where we passed the night. Next morning (6th July) we were turned out, but another man came and gave an egg to each child, which was all the food they had had for nearly thirty hours. Later, a villainous-looking man stripped Mr. S. of his only remaining garment, and took some of the women's and children's few remaining clothes, leaving them in a pitiable condition . . . After dark we went to the *yamen* (court-house), asking for help from the Mandarin, but we were not allowed inside the city, though after a long delay some food and a few articles of clothing were given to us. We were sent off in small carts to the boundary of the district.

'11th July. We were moving quietly forward, though not being allowed to rest anywhere. We walked through the streets of another fairly large town, and crowds of men came yelling, most of them with sticks and agricultural tools, some going in front of us and some following with spears. That night we slept in another guard-room, and soon after daybreak, still feeling very tired after our midnight experience, and having had no food, we started to walk again . . .

'In the next city we decided once more to go to the *yamen*, but the Mandarin here gave us a good supply of bread and water, and sent us off at once in carts, giving us an escort to the boundary of his district and a little money to help us on to the next city. The escort and carts, however, left us on the road a little distance beyond the boundary. Just after dark, we lay down to sleep in a hollow. Mr. S. and Mr. C. started off next morning to a village close at hand, to try to hire a cart for the children and women, some of whom were quite unable to walk further, but they were robbed and driven out of the village. It now started to rain heavily, and the rest of us sought shelter in a hut, when two men appeared with a stick and a whip, driving us out and on to the next village, even the poor babies receiving blows. Miss R. and Miss H. said that they would follow on slowly and sought shelter . . . and we knew nothing of their horrible treatment and terrible suffering and of Miss R.'s death until some days later. The absence of bedding or packing of any sort, together with our cramped condition, made travelling in carts very uncomfortable, and when passing over paved roads caused not a little pain . . . From the last city, we passed

onwards for five days, and were now treated as prisoners. An escort protected us from violence but treated us like cattle. For four nights men, women and children were lodged together in a common jail, our resting places being filthy ground without any mats, and with bricks for our heads, Generally, the warder or soldier smoked opium most of the night, with very little ventilation. For three days we got no water, and with verminous sores and wounds and the terrible heat, our condition became day by day more unbearable, the little ones being scorched by the sun, due to their lack of clothing and open sores. The baby of Mr. and Mrs. S. died on the 27th July from exhaustion . . . Seventeen miles from the city on Friday, 3rd August, Jessie, the elder girl of Mr. and Mrs. S. died . . . On the 6th August Mrs. C. died . . . On the 16th August Miss H. died from wounds received when Miss R. was killed.

‘After we had reached Hankow, the little son of Mr. C. passed on to join his mother, and of the party which had started, two little ones had gone, and of another party which had joined us on the way, three others had died.’

Here is an extract from another letter:

‘The Boxers swept through the country like a plague of locusts, devouring, murdering, plundering. Elder S. K. of the Chinese Church had his house looted and his wife murdered. Evangelist K., with wife and children, escaped to the hills . . . Pastor C. is still living, but seven of our Christians were murdered and twenty-seven of the nearby Church at P. were killed, others beaten. Mr. W., the missionary, was taken to the Mandarin, who told the crowd to take him away and do as they pleased. They killed him. Mr. B., another missionary, was put to death in the same cruel way. Mr. and Mrs. K. and child were killed, the child first and then the mother . . .

‘At the town of Hwochow, in Shansi, Miss Stevens and Miss Clark were in charge of the school. Holidays came and they were invited to stay, towards the end of June 1900, with colleagues at Taiyuanfu mission station. The Governor of the Province ordered them all to move to a house near to his *yamen*. On the 8th July they arrived to find that with other missionaries and families they were twenty-six in number, including children, in two small courts. Just before noon on the 9th July, the sub-prefect called and made a list of all the foreigners and Chinese . . . At about 2 p.m., the Governor himself ordered the arrest of all in the house, and between files of soldiers marched them to the *yamen* . . . Having asked the missionaries where they came from—Protestant and Catholic alike—he

shouted, "Kill!" His defenceless victims were all murdered.' . . .

In June 1900 Eva French was visiting her villagers in Shansi as usual, and after a meeting for women, she spent the night with Mrs. Meng, a Chinese Christian. Sleeping on the cool brick *kang* (or bed), which, in winter was heated from a fire below with a flue running through the middle, they were now alone, and Mrs. Meng could speak. 'Teacher,' she said in the darkness, 'there are terrible rumours. A society called the Boxers or the "Righteous Fists" threatens to kill every Christian. Teacher, they are devil-possessed and no weapon can wound them. Our village is full of them . . .'

Eva stayed with her a few days and read to her and other Chinese friends from the Book of the Revelation: 'I know thy works and tribulation and poverty . . . But be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life.' Looking at her, Eva said: 'Never forget that command, Mrs. Meng.' 'Teacher, I know,' she replied.

A few weeks later the Boxer bands, sword in hand, were drilling, and the order had gone forth to kill. Mrs. Meng sat spinning at her loom when a band of Boxers came to her courtyard door. She rose and asked them in, saying quietly: 'Gentlemen, I am ready, but just allow me to change my dress.' She left the room, prayed for a moment, and put on her best frock. Coming back, she turned to them and said simply: 'Now, Sirs, I am ready.' In a moment her head was severed from her body.

In Shansi Province nearly six hundred Protestant Christians were murdered, with fifty British and American missionaries. Some Christians recanted; others escaped to the hills; numbers had the sign of the Cross cut in their foreheads, bearing in their bodies, like St. Paul before them, the marks of their Master. One, Ho Chiang Kuei, was beaten with a thousand lashes and died in prison. Chiang Lao, who was invited to recant, replied: 'I cannot forsake the Truth.' Chou Chi Ch'eng was discovered with a copy of the Bible on his person. The book was opened before him and he was asked to forswear Christianity. 'It is impossible,' he said, and was buried alive. Cheo Hsin Mao was placed under the blade of a straw-cutter. When told: 'Now recant,' he replied: 'I am not afraid, only be quick.' Wang Hsin was told to repent or suffer. 'I have repented already,' he replied. 'By the Grace of God, I am not going to change again . . .'

Eva, in China for seven years, was now an experienced missionary, and when the Boxer troubles began, she had several young missionaries in her charge for the summer months. They first came into

contact with the Boxers when they were visiting a Shansi town which was not particularly hostile. Near its centre stood the mission compound. One day, during lunch, the missionaries were startled to find an angry mob hammering for admission on the gate of the compound. Eva realised that they were caught in a trap at the very centre of the town. She decided that the immediate thing to do was to put herself and her young colleagues under the protection of the town Magistrate.

A small local boy, who had rushed in to warn the women of the angry crowd outside, piloted them through a side-gate and along the narrow streets. It was a good ten minutes' walk. As they were leaving, Eva told her young colleagues: 'Keep together, walk quietly and don't look frightened.' Several of them picked up their Bibles and all followed her out. They endeavoured to avoid the main streets, but suddenly their exit was discovered and they heard the cry: 'Kill the foreign devils.' Quietly these disciplined women walked into the crowd. There was a hush in the shouting and the crowd fell back. A way opened up before them. Finally, they arrived at the *yamen* to find the court-house already packed with people. Eva spoke to the Magistrate and with her faculties awake, she detected from his accent that he came from South China, where the Boxer troubles were not as widespread as they were in the north. Later, they were to learn that the Mandarin had received a despatch from the Empress Dowager that very day to the effect that all foreigners in the town were to be killed . . .

'I have orders to kill you,' he shouted loudly, so that all could hear. 'What are you women doing here in this city alone? Where are your menfolk?' He was pacing up and down the room. The watching crowd was eager for blood. To them, at least he must give the impression of loyalty to the Peking Government, but evidently he had no wish to carry out the orders received. Passing close to Eva, he muttered to her: 'Whatever you do, *don't go north.*' Then, turning to the crowd, he called out that he was arranging for carts to send the women north to Peking! . . . All through that long night the women remained in the court-house, but at daybreak they set off with an official passport, which stated to every Mandarin on the route and into whose area they would come that he was held responsible for their safety whilst they were journeying through his district, or alternatively, he was himself to kill them. An escort, too, was provided to accompany them to the boundary of the Shansi Province. And so they went out . . . Later, they learned that for his clemency to them, this Mandarin had been degraded. The

soldiers of the escort revealed, too, that on seeing the women coming from the compound in the city, each one holding something in the large sleeve of her dress as she walked through the crowd, it had been whispered that they were holding not Bibles but 'foreign pistols' —so they had been permitted to pass!

The Treaty Port of Hankow, where protection would await them, lay many weary days ahead. In springless carts, heavily curtained to hide them from the streets, four days passed before they even reached the borders of Shansi. At night they would be smuggled into a village or to a town court-house until morning, and through the dark hours they would hear the feet of passing crowds and the cry of, 'Foreign devils'. Before dawn, soldiers would call them for another dangerous day on the roads. It was the hot season of the year, too, and the dusty air was sometimes stifling. Day after day, week after week, they continued on their slow journey. When other refugees joined them, they heard disturbing stories of murder, some by public execution, others in private homes and even by the roadside. One Mandarin kept them for fourteen days, refusing to accept the responsibility for sending them forward, but Eva's Shansi passport finally helped to persuade him where his duty lay, and on they went for another fifty days. Sleeping in temples and verminous prisons, the company of Western and Chinese refugees steadily grew. One man went mad, a sick woman and two children were buried by the roadside, but to the last, the group of Chinese Christians still stayed with them.

During most of China's troubled times, the 'silver dollar' has been a sort of basic currency or 'gold standard', paper money often being almost useless to keep life moving or hospitals, schools and mission stations open. In Canton I have seen heavy boxes of dollars taken on to trains as missionaries' luggage, which they would need to guard night after night by sleeping on them as they travelled inland to some distant station. And as Eva French's party moved wearily along the road, it was one such case of dollars which saved her life. They had gone a few miles from an overnight resting place, when a crowd of Boxers caught up with them. Realising her responsibility, Eva was sitting on the front cart when a tough looking fellow came toward her. With one hand he drew his sword and raised it over her head to strike. With his other hand he seized her by the hair and pulled her from the cart on to the ground. At that moment, one of his companions slit open a box of silver dollars he had seen in the cart, and the money spilled out on to the road. The sight of

another Boxer grabbing the money was too much for Eva's captor, and flinging her aside, he seized the box of silver and disappeared. She struggled to her feet, rather dazed, saw what had happened, and for the first time realised to her surprise that she had not been afraid. Describing the incident later, she spoke of a 'Peace of God garrisoning her mind'. But for her friends and family at home there was grave anxiety, for she was reported as having been murdered.

From Hankow, Eva journeyed on to Shanghai, China still in turmoil. Weeks passed, and Western forces marched on Peking. The Empress Dowager fled to Sian, the ancient capital of China.

Eva's first furlough being already due, she sailed for Britain.

No official account of the actual losses of missionary personnel seems ever to have been established. One missionary estimated the number of Chinese Christians killed to be as high as 30,000. Another put the losses of Catholic missionaries as 44, and Protestant as 136, with 53 of their children.

Tragic as were those events, they marked the end of an epoch. Basically they were a protest against the violation of China's national integrity. They have been described by an historian* as 'the greatest defence against the Christian West by a non-European civilisation since the Indian Mutiny of 1857'. The restoration of order brought the troops of the great European Powers under one single command for the only time in history.

The Boxer Rising was also the beginning of the end of the Manchu dynasty and it marked the rise of a new nation. Painfully China was being re-born, and, strange to say, after the suppression of the Boxers, for a generation one of the dominant ideas became co-operation with Western ways in education, technology, democracy, and, for some years, with Christian missions.

At home, much sympathy was felt for those who had suffered, but there were some who said that if the churches felt that they must share with the Chinese people the Christian Gospel, their missionaries should not expect protection and should certainly not accept indemnities for damage done to life and property. The China Inland Mission and some other missions accepted none. Hudson Taylor, the founder, had once said that what the world needed more than anything else was 'cross-bearing people'. That was the sort of a language which Eva French understood.

When, within twelve months, missionaries were allowed to go back again to China, Eva French was with them.

* A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle For Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918*, Oxford University Press.

MILDRED AND FRANCESCA

3-ENTER MILDRED CABLE

AFTER seven years in the Far East and her gruelling adventures with the Boxers, Eva was a much more mature person. In age she was thirty-one, in experience she was a veteran.

Accompanying her on the way back to Shansi Province after her leave in England, was Alice Mildred Cable. To a twenty-two year old, a difference of nine years can seem almost a lifetime, and in the last few years Eva had sobered up considerably. She was essentially the same person, quieter perhaps, but still alternating between spurts of vitality and caution. Yet there was a difference. Life – all of it – was in God's hands. She did not just believe in God: she trusted Him.

To this new companionship, Mildred Cable brought a steadiness of touch and – important for the intense Eva and for life in China at that time – a sense of humour. Eva would smile whimsically at a joke and the corners of her mouth would twitch bewitchingly. Mildred would laugh out loud and her whole being shake with merriment. Both had the gift of being able to laugh at themselves. Eva was tall and rather angular; Mildred was shorter, a rather slight, more fragile figure. As the senior, Eva could be tough, as for example, in her decision that Mildred must live for a time in a village with a Chinese family which knew no English. But Mildred could take it, though her background was very different. Her early years had been orderly, settled, and deep-dyed in the British way of life. She had been brought up in Guildford, where year after year Surrey wheat ripened over the rolling golden downs, without a hint of revolution or upheaval. As Cobbett had said, Guildford was a 'happy-looking' place. It had an air of history about it, going back through King Harold to King Alfred, who, in fact, had bequeathed it to his nephew. There was everything the England of that day expected of a dignified bourgeois countryside: a castle; a river spanned by a bridge; a sixteenth century Grammar School and a seventeenth century Guildhall. 'Ladies' cricket' had first been played there in 1745! There were still quaint gables, a few low latticed windows, and a High Street running through the town – on which Mildred's father was in a business partnership. In the family

were three brothers and two sisters, the girls being pupils at the Guildford Girls' High School, where they remember Mildred as 'Alice Cable'. All was seemly and in order, the family living in a comfortable house in Maori Road, with garden and tennis court. During some special children's services, at the age of twelve, Mildred became a Christian, and though she often had to 'fight for her faith', she did not waver in her allegiance. Yet even in Guildford, there were two Englands: one Anglican and Conservative, the other Independent and Radical. Mildred belonged to the latter, and all her days remained a respectable, though sometimes a rather vigorous rebel. Before going to China, on which her heart had been set for seven or eight years, she became a qualified chemist, taking her M.P.S. with advanced Physics and Chemistry, studying under Prof. J. Norman Collie; to these she added other courses in anatomy, surgery and midwifery, and herself taught some of those subjects. Dr. Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel, which she joined when she was studying in London, wrote of her to the China Inland Mission at that time: 'I have never recommended anyone for missionary work with more heartiness or stronger conviction of their fitness.'

So together they went forward, Eva and Mildred, and it was the beginning of a fifty-year partnership. They came to a new China. After the Boxer Rising, Europe had reinforced its determination not to leave China out of its reckoning, and had insisted that Western trade should now penetrate beyond China's shores, along her vast waterways and over the stony roads of centuries into her heart-lands.

In the feelings of the common people of China, the Boxer rising had been an historical watershed, for its failure to be rid of the West meant that the old taboos were defeated. Old China was out-moded, its superstitions, as well as its culture, had appeared to be powerless against the dynamic thrust from Christendom. So in China, as in other ancient societies, the turning-point had come, when medievalism, with its sanctions and its absolutes, had failed; Western ways would henceforth enfeeble the sinews of tradition. The cake of custom was broken; the firm ground and stability of antiquity had gone. When that point of no return is reached in a community, novelty becomes the touchstone of taste; tradition the hallmark of middle-age and mediocrity. The winds of change are blowing.

So the Boxer riots marked the beginning of the end of nearly three centuries of history, and real revolution was around the corner. Christian education received a new lease of life in China.

It was in this setting that the two went north to distant Hwochow

in Shansi Province, and Mildred Cable was thrilled with all she saw. Entering this new land produced in her an excitement which was almost painful, and no wonder, for China is something unique on earth: the people, the vastness of the country, the slow pace of rural life, mile after mile, village after village. The rich brown *loess* soil had been blown for thousands of years across hundreds of miles of Central Asia from the erosion of the Gobi Desert. With an eye for vividness, she never forgot the thousands of acres of scarlet poppies, for which her favourite adjective was 'iridescent'. 'The fields of poppies were like a sea,' she wrote, 'with waves of light and shade alternating as the wind blew across the tall stems and brilliant blooms in ever-changing tones.' This exquisite scene was framed by the distant snow-capped Ho Mountains. But as the weeks passed she noted, too, how quickly her iridescent landscape changed as the red petals fell. 'Like the results of a dose of opium, they leave behind long bare stalks and black ominous heads, sprouting from a now visible khaki earth.' To Mildred, all life was a parable: a story with a meaning and a moral. Soon, those black pods would produce deadly juice, to coagulate for many Chinese into the drug of dreams, followed by the dull disillusion of despair.

The 'foreign smoke' had now become indigenous, though twenty years before, Li Hung Chang, a Chinese statesman, had written with deep emotion: 'Stalwart men and women have been made paupers, vagrants, and the lowest of criminals, and hundreds of thousands of the weaker ones of my race — mainly among the women — have been sent to suicide graves. All this because gold and territory are greater in the eyes of the British Government than the rights and bodies of a weak people.' What a commentary it was on our British schizophrenia that the Christian Gospel, which had come to Canton in Morrison's Chinese Bible, and the opium which had been thrust on China by our 'nation of shop-keepers', should have been wrapped up in the same parcel, labelled 'Western Civilisation'.

For Eva French, coming to Hwochow was different. At the end of the long journey up from the coast, there before them stood the house in which the two English women she had known and whom they were to succeed had lived before their murder by the Boxers. The Chinese Church itself had not yet got over the shock. She must have felt like a Londoner after a night of sirens and destruction during the Blitz. 'There is salvage work enough to keep our hands full,' she said. So from village to village she went, her concern being to strengthen the 'battered believers'. It was a solemn occasion. In one town, fifty missionaries lay buried. In another was the spot where

she herself had so narrowly escaped death. Mildred, too, fell silent at the place where the body of a woman missionary lay buried. It was she who had first talked to Mildred in England about going to China. She was told that the Boxers had thrown the dead body into the baptistry of the church.

The fabric of the mission house where they were to live was not yet repaired, so they shared one small room, but Eva, as in Portsmouth, in Liverpool and in her early China days, could not rest for long away from the people. Out again they went, Eva to talk and encourage, for her Chinese was good; Mildred to listen and to learn and (thanks to the medical training she had done in London) to heal.

Some years before the Boxer rising, a Confucian scholar, by name Hsi, had been Chinese teacher to the Methodist missionary, David Hill, and eventually he had become a Christian. As 'Pastor Hsi', he had started Christian work in Hwochow. Mr. Hsi had once been an opium smoker, but after intense suffering had freed himself from the craving, and having done so, felt that he could help others in his native Province of Shansi. He prepared a medicine which he thought would be helpful, and later turned his home into what he called an 'Opium Refuge', for which he and his wife sacrificed their family resources. By visitation, by companionship with opium victims, and by instruction in the Christian religion and prayer, man after man had conquered the habit.

The centre of this work, Hwochow, was one of the smaller cities of Shansi Province, but it was situated not far from secondary routes from Peking south via Sian, on towards the Old Silk Road to Central Asia. Herman,* the German author, has written that for centuries, caravans consisting of as many as a hundred men with pack animals, passing along the Silk Road, would proceed through 'Jade Gate' and on across the vast deserts to the West. Centuries ago, rest houses were set up along this route for the changing of horses and for the refreshment of travellers. In places, the Silk Road was little more than a track between oasis-towns, but along its length still went traffic connecting Peking with Central Asia and the West: camels laden with goods, donkeys bearing sacks of flour, carts loaded with tobacco, paper and wares from the large cities, caravans of travellers in mat-covered carts or curtained litters drawn by mules, peasants, clad in their blue or indigo cotton jackets and trousers. Dust would coil upward as along this same road went state messengers, or *yamen*

* Quoted by B. Davidson, *Turkistan Alive*, Jonathan Cape.

runners, shouting excitedly and riding their Mongolian ponies from town to town. There were Moslems from Turkistan, lamas from Tibet coming on pilgrimage to the sacred Wutai mountain, even Russian exiles, travelling east. Though Hwochow was in a back-water and its main street only a tributary to the distant stream of movement, it, too, was a busy place, with travellers coming and going. On the north side of the street ran the River Fen, and across the bridge, guarding the inhabitants from flood, stood the solemn-faced protector of the community – a Sacred Cow in bronze . . . Such was to be the new home-town of Eva and Mildred.

Despite ten months of lovely sunshine in Shansi each year, nights and winter days could be bitterly cold, and at certain times of the year, biting winds carried fine dust, blowing eastwards from the heart of Asia. Along the Hwochow main street, dismal inns welcomed the weary traveller with picturesque red-charactered signs on their doors, assuring him that 'From the Four Seas men gather to this Hotel, whose food is famous'. At right angles to Main Street was another, where lived the Magistrate, or Mandarin. There, too, were the law courts, or *yamen*. This was the city's shopping centre, and strung across the lively streets were lines of laundry, and cotton goods for sale. Along each side stood booths, from which arose the smells of cooking pork or frying fish – odours which pervaded the whole cheerful, noisy scene. This was *China*! To walk along the narrower streets was almost like passing through a tunnel, where everything, from eggs and soap to baggy cotton trousers, was on sale. At peak periods the hubbub was deafening, but through it all, multitudes of babies slept soundly – and every two seconds one more Chinese baby came into the world.

Off these two thoroughfares ran small lanes, each lined with dumb, blank, unrevealing walls, pierced here and there by a door kept vigilantly closed. Behind the walls fierce dogs barked. To the stranger, those closed courts were ever an unsolved mystery. With squat, one-storied buildings, the courtyard of a Chinese was his castle. Inside were his family or clan; outside, beggars could sit and die of hunger, while pigs scavenged amongst the refuse in open drains. The head of the clan was lord and master of a self-satisfied group of blood relations. But he must always remember his ancestors, so on another important street of Hwochow the city temple stood, and it was next to this that in his early days Mr. Hsi had set up his first opium refuge.

To this city, then, Eva French and Mildred Cable had come to take up their work for Chinese women and girls and to help the small

Chinese Church which already existed. Around them they found the illiteracy, lethargy, poverty, exploitation and superstition of a simple peasant people, as well as a small élite of cultured Manchu officials – their ‘betters’.

Why did they go? What had they to offer China?

Their own ideas were simple and fairly forthright. They believed that the Universe does not explain itself; that the basis of religion is the need for a meaning to life, and a sense of purpose. They held that in the Christian religion is to be found the answer – a way out of the world’s jungle of self-interest and frustration. To them, Jesus of Nazareth was unique. He had seen more deeply into the human dilemma than any other person of whom mankind had record. Christ had come from the heart of the Universe, and no explanation of Him in fortuitous terms was satisfactory. In Him, they believed, the redemptive principle at the back of all life had become reality – indeed flesh and blood.

Naturally, therefore, for these two women there was no substitute for telling the unique story of Jesus, and no work more important than the building of the corporate life of a community on a Christian basis, where love could leap over human barriers of race, class and self-interest, to express itself in full, free abundant life.

4 – THE HUMAN MATERIAL OF A CHURCH

THE Christians in Hwochow who had survived Boxer riots naturally felt lonely and isolated. When the two women arrived, some felt that their village visitations would cause them to neglect the older churches, which had suffered. ‘Have you not been appointed to work here?’ one of the senior church members asked Miss French. ‘Yes,’ replied Eva, ‘we have, but we must also help women in Chaocheng, Hungling and Fensi, until workers can be in residence there. Moreover, our schools are particularly for women and girls.’ To which he replied: ‘But surely you are aware that we have been as sheep without a shepherd for many months?’

Eva’s forthright solution however was not, as might have been expected, to stay for longer periods in Hwochow. Knowing that some of the people had been Christians for a dozen or more years, she felt that they must be left free to grow in Christian witness. ‘Have you not been a church member for twelve years?’ she gently asked one of them. ‘Nearly thirteen,’ was the prompt reply. ‘Then

you are no longer a babe in Christ, but able to help others as *we* take up new work.'

'Soon we shall make another tour of the villages outside this district – a long one,' she said to the twenty-two year old Mildred, who had stood balancing in her mind the issues between strategy and diplomacy. 'Younger converts will come from the villages to join these older members in the churches. In any case, we cannot allow them to hinder the work.'

'Time heals wounds,' wrote Mildred Cable later. 'Eva was right.' The same old church member remarked, after one of their long absences: 'It is good to have you back . . . *You* know how to manage this place.' But to 'manage' the Chinese churches was exactly what Eva did not want to do. She wanted them to *grow*.

Forces such as divination, fortune-telling, dreams, dominate the lives of half the world's peasant peoples. Remotely, they believe in the idea of one Supreme Sky-God, but whatever the official creed – Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam – ordinary folk throughout the world are, for the most part, animists, ancestor-worshippers and believers in magic. In China, you could be a Buddhist, a Confucian, and a Taoist all at the same time, and though it was poles apart from the official Confucian ethical system, polytheistic animism dominated the simple, illiterate people of Old China. 'Spirits' animated heaven, earth, fire, mountains, rivers, rocks, trees – and in particular, the souls of the dead. *Kwei*, or demons, swarmed everywhere and the feeling of complete solitude in lonely places was not possible for a simple Chinese. For him, the hillside, the mountain gorge, the sands of the desert, were peopled with presences, good and evil, and in the great events of life – birth, marriage and death – the influence of spirits was dominant.

And yet, alongside these same beliefs, there existed a most moving annual religious festival. Once every year the Emperor accepted as God's chosen representative on earth, would proceed in state to the Temple of Heaven at Peking. After the performance of sacrificial worship, he would enter alone into an inner central court, to stand under its beautiful circular sky-blue dome, there to communicate with the Supreme Being and to submit for approval or disapproval his stewardship during the past year. Here, surely, was one of the most moving and beautiful ceremonies in all the life of Ancestral China.

But in contrast a vivid impression of her new world and its psychology came for Mildred Cable from one of the woman patients

in the Hwochow opium refuge. After a few weeks there, the woman had become interested in Christianity, and on her return to her village, with great courage had destroyed her house-gods and idols, reserving only one beautifully carved idol in her son's room. The son's wife, too, had for some time desired to become Christian, but had not yet dared to take any decision. That remaining idol troubled her. Six months later, when Eva and Mildred visited the village, a special messenger asked, if they would see this same girl who, it was stated, had become demon-possessed. A crowd was standing outside the house. Inside, the girl, chanting in a weird minor note and lying naked on the floor, was refusing to eat. The family was terrified. Eva and Mildred with a Chinese evangelist entered the house. As they knelt to pray, the girl muttered: 'This room is full of spirits — as one leaves, another enters.' Endeavouring to calm her, they asked her to repeat a prayer. She tried and after some effort, she managed to articulate the words: 'Lord Jesus, save me.' Then, in the name of God, Eva and Mildred commanded the spirit to leave her. The girl's body trembled; she sneezed repeatedly, then became calm. She asked for clothes and apologised. Later, she told them she believed the spirits had been using the idol remaining in her husband's room as a last refuge. So the parents handed the idol to Miss French to be destroyed. From this time on, Eva wrote, the girl became a normal and healthy young person.

Whatever we may think of the animistic background and the psychological processes causing such mental and spiritual distress, they are realities which have to be faced in a primitive society, whether it be in Asia or Africa. I have heard Mildred Cable speak of the appalling sense of conflict with personal evil which she herself experienced from time to time in commanding a spirit to leave its distraught victim. All her life, she would treat with a certain sense of awe the idols and images which had been symbols of worship to other people. 'Two methods of exorcism are used by the professional sorcerers in China,' she once said, 'defiance and bribery, but the Christian method is that of commanding in the name of Christ, the evil spirit to release the victim.'

Acres of the best watered land around some of the outlying villages in Shansi were given up to poppy cultivation. During the time when the plant was in flower, the villages nestled amidst the fields of scarlet bloom. In three or four weeks the poppy-heads were the size of hens' eggs, and hundreds of labourers, with simple tools made of three or four knife-blades bound together like the teeth of a comb,

passed through the fields, wounding each poppy-head with deep cuts. This operation was carried out in the afternoon, and by morning a sort of milky ooze had solidified, to be collected into pots and dried for three or four weeks, before the farmer sold it to a district agent. Sometimes, mixed with linseed oil, it was made into small balls or cakes for the local retail market.

At the time the Two came to Shansi, production of opium in China was supposed to be about equal to that imported from India through the Treaty Ports. While some opium smokers in Old China managed to keep the habit in check, others became its slave, since the soporific and hallucinatory effects for which the drug is desired become weaker with its regular use, so that more and more is required to produce the same result. And addiction brings both physical and moral deterioration. A few years after the Boxer rebellion, when the national conscience was aroused, the Chinese Government ordered the registration of all opium smokers and later passed legislation with the aim of abolishing the habit. Today, the United Nations Narcotics Commission, in Geneva, endeavours to control the output of opium from some sixteen countries, but not all Governments co-operate.

One of the leaders of the Shansi Church when the Two arrived was a certain Pastor Wang, whose story we tell because such cases were not infrequent in the Chinese Church of that day. In ever-increasing numbers, opium refuges had been opened in villages, and Pastor Wang was in charge of a central refuge, in Hwochow. The treatment was the same as that used by Pastor Hsi in earlier days, partly medical, partly psychological and religious. Pastor Hsi gave his patients pills, and in picturesque Chinese, he styled them the 'Pills of Life'. These were graded between the 'Pills of Strength', and the final 'Pill of Restoration'. Verses of the New Testament were taught to the opium victims and happy, simple hymns had to be learned by heart, some of which had been composed by Pastor Hsi himself, with as many as twelve verses! Prayer was made for the patient, and the atmosphere of the hostel was one of spiritual discipline and quiet confidence – something new for many of the emaciated, penniless human wrecks who drifted into the refuges. Even before he had become Christian and when he was still a teenager, Wang had a sensitive conscience. When his father died, his mother had earned enough by spinning to enable him to continue his schooling. At the age of fifteen he was married, by virtue of an engagement contracted years before. But the middle-man who had arranged the marriage was a crook, and when Wang saw his young

bride for the first time she turned out to be a helpless cripple. Famine came to Shansi, and for two or three successive years harvests failed, and hundreds of people died. 'No pen can fully describe the horrors of that time,' Mildred Cable wrote to her friends. 'Weeds, leaves, bark of trees, were eaten for food, and of a hundred and thirty families which inhabited Wang's particular village, only thirty remained'. When one day Wang himself had gone on a distant journey, to seek food, he returned to find that his mother had hanged herself, rather than continue to consume food which might keep him alive. The famine continued, and Wang went to live with an uncle, who was a silversmith.

For three years the faithful Wang mourned his mother and later he became, like his uncle, a silversmith. His uncle was a kind person, but sick and heavily in debt. With failing health, the sick man turned to opium, until an ounce a day of the drug became a necessity. Some of Wang's young friends, too, were already addicted to the habit, and one had accidentally been burned to death whilst doped. Another, having parted with all his possessions, sold his young wife to an inn-keeper to buy more opium. One of the duties of young Wang, still a faithful Confucian, was regularly to fill his uncle's opium pipe. And so, he himself began the habit. When his uncle became seriously ill, Wang in desperation went to the China Inland Mission in Hwochow for medical help, and there for the first time he heard the Christian story. Medicine was given him for his uncle, who though still sick, lived for many months. Soon, however, Wang found himself responsible for the business and overwhelmed with debts. From childhood, he had followed the only light he knew. He had been faithful in duty as a subject to his ruler, as a son to his father and mother, as a younger brother to older brother, as a husband to his wife, and as friend to friend. Indeed, he had overtaxed his strength, had taken a vow of asceticism and had sold his own goods to pay his uncle's creditors. He respected all life and was a vegetarian.

Still, he found himself turning to opium as an escape from life's tensions. So to the opium refuge he went, and there, in Mildred Cable's words, 'He saw the beauty of Christ' after which, all unconsciously, he had sought for so many years. Here, he felt, was the fulfilment of his own inner longing, and here too, within a Christian community, was a sense of 'belonging'. The consciousness of the Presence with him, of the love of God within, was quite overwhelming, and steadily it transformed the whole of life.

News of his cure from opium spread through the villages, for he

was well known. His example became quite a power in the countryside. Daily, people sought him out, and morning and evening, at his workshop and in his home, they would come to talk to him, and with him seek God in the Bible. Ultimately, Wang was appointed an Elder in the Church and later still he was ordained Pastor and put in charge of the men's opium refuge at Hwochow.

'How did *you* come to believe?' one person would ask another. 'I owe it to Pastor Wang, who taught me about Christ,' would be the reply. One day, when Eva and Mildred were chatting with a group of village women, endeavouring to convince them that 'all had sinned and come short of the glory of God', one old woman in the crowd called out: 'That's not true. I know a man who has never spoken a false word, nor done an unkind deed. His name is Pastor Wang of your church.'

As we have seen, one sequel to the Boxer rising was a new interest in all things Western and in Christianity, and Eva French and Mildred Cable soon found themselves overwhelmed with opportunities to talk to people in the villages. Untouched areas begged for visits, and it even became popular to destroy idols, regardless of any Christian motive or conviction. People begged for education, and fathers were prepared for almost any sacrifice if their daughters could attend school. The Two continued touring the villages, spending a day here, two days there, aiming chiefly to influence the women, for they remembered that this was the main work for which they had gone to China.

Despite polygamy, women in Old China often had great influence, but in her young days a Chinese woman was often despised, even ill-treated. As in so many pagan lands, it was a man's world. The experience of the young bride could be extremely humiliating. In her marriage arrangements parents exercised control, which gave rise to a strange class of matchmakers, or 'go-betweens', and in most cases husband and wife, when brought together, had not previously seen each other. When a wife became a mother, however, she was treated with great respect in the household.

For some centuries, it seems to have been the Chinese fashion to bind the tiny feet of female children, and even two generations ago men respected women with bound feet. But the custom was limited to the Chinese middle and upper classes, as the workers and servants did not practise foot-binding, nor did the Manchu ruling caste.

Ten years before the arrival of Eva French in China, work amongst women and girls had been started in Hwochow, and the girls' school

had consisted of some twenty or thirty scholars, with Miss Clark, prior to her murder by the Boxers, in charge. After the arrival of the Two it was decided that Mildred should restart the school. With the new interest in Western ways, the Government of the time was increasingly establishing schools for girls, and the Two were faced with the question as to whether education in China should remain purely secular. Moreover, it became increasingly evident to them that Christian Chinese leaders in home, family and village life would be necessary if the Church was to serve China, to take root and grow. Already eager Chinese youths and girls from Christian homes were seeking education. Opportunity was knocking at the door.

So with her pioneering zeal, but also with a certain reluctance, Mildred Cable accepted, as we shall later see, the discipline of work in an institution. This meant giving up much of the joy and freedom of village travel, with all its personal contacts; but she had the necessary ability, was a born leader, and a good organiser—with a capacity to delegate responsibility.

She started by gathering together some of the girls from Christian families, and the school grew rapidly. Staff were trained, scholars increased. Meanwhile, Eva continued her itinerary in the villages. Both of them felt that a growing Chinese Church must itself be the chief agent and medium for the spread of the Christian way of life, so to the girls' school was added a course for Christian married women from the villages. This training, which lasted only a few weeks, gave them some knowledge of the Christian way of looking at life, and entailed a certain amount of New Testament study.

Years passed, and more space became necessary, so with the help of funds subscribed by friends at home, a group of new buildings was erected. In addition to the new school, a church with a seating capacity of six hundred was provided. Meanwhile, Pastor Wang supervised the work amongst the men of Hwochow, the Two looking after the women and girls. The erection of the buildings was in itself an example of the resource constantly needed in mission work, as well as an amusing commentary on the easy ways of Old China. Eager and excited helpers searched the countryside for suitable timber. Trees were bought and felled, soon to reappear as 'pillars of the church'. Even old buildings in the city were purchased and demolished, and the heaps of rubble were sorted into usable and unusable material for the new building. To quote Mildred: 'As the walls went up, empty spaces about the city increased in number!' The 'professional' workers were a rather ill-assorted lot, and certainly,

the practical experience of the Two grew apace. When on one occasion a thief was caught stealing the workmen's tools, the workmen indignantly took the law into their own hands and had him strung up by his thumbs to a beam. The combined efforts of Pastor Wang and the two missionaries were needed to obtain his release. Later, Mildred Cable received the builders' account, which read: 'To missing tools unclaimed in accordance with missionaries' loving heart - 2/-.' Every tenth day, in accordance with custom, a 'reward for work' had to be paid to each man over and above his wages, and consisted of one pound of flour and a handful of vegetables. Then, for the many local helpers, town officials and Chinese subscribers to the building fund, a 'feast' had to be given at each stage in the building, but because, according to the Chinese social system, no woman could be invited to such occasions, the only share the Two could enjoy in these celebrations was to pay the bills!

5-TWO BECOME THREE

WHEN Eva's mother died in Richmond, Surrey, Francesca, who had been her constant companion, undertook some hospital training, and later, in Dublin, took a course in midwifery. She was rather more fragile in physical make-up than her sister Eva, and was something of a saint. Her sensitiveness to the feelings of others was an important element in her charm, and, unlike Eva, she loved her nursing course. Often in the hospital ward she longed to help people whom she saw bearing the strain of suffering or about to face an operation. She would talk sometimes to close friends about the necessity of 'sharing in the fellowship of suffering'. Eva shared this compassion for the suffering of others, but in a different way. In Eva's case the response was more active, perhaps less sympathetic: something must be *done* about it. Francesca had other gifts, too. Her considerable literary ability was doubtless inherited from her mother, and, indeed, from early days the family had literary and artistic connections. Before me as I write, lies a copy of *The Wind Among the Reeds*, by W. B. Yeats - given by his sisters to the French family in 1902.

Francesca was now free for the first time for many years to decide the direction of her life, and when Eva and Mildred came home on leave from China, they put before her the claims of that country, and more particularly, the need of women there. She decided to join them, but it was not an easy decision. Would it really work?

Already, between Mildred and Eva there was an evident unity of purpose and deep attachment . . . When Francesca had taken her decision, Mildred made a firm resolve, that from the very start (I quote her words), 'nothing should be allowed to reveal any exclusive element in the friendship between the Two.' So the Two became 'The Trio', and Francesca's willing spirit and eager help was soon appreciated in that busy Hwochow compound. Her help was now greatly needed, and she was soon immersed in their group activities. To a friend, she wrote: 'China keeps us to early rising, and long before daylight, the first gong sounds to waken what has become a live Christian community. Two hundred young people now assemble for family prayers and schooling, and from the child in the kindergarten to the teenagers who are taking a Teacher-Training Course, they sit in quiet, attentive rows for worship, and later, for work. In their search for new knowledge, they are an enthusiastic as well as a large family, and to them, holidays are a waste of good time. Here are the children of a rapidly growing Christian community, coming from homes both near and far, and moreover, they are in a hurry.' A new China was now 'off the ground'.

In addition to existing activity, it was now felt necessary to start a Bible School for senior girls, some of whom would go back into the villages as evangelists and leaders, as wives and mothers, to carry with them Christian influences and to do personal work in what might become a self-propagating Christian Church. As in Britain (to quote G. M. Trevelyan), it was hoped that the Bible might become the 'foundation of a new social order' in the new China. So in the mornings, some of the senior girls, with copies of the Chinese Bible on their knees and pencils in their hands, sat listening and taking notes, marking passages which were expounded to them, and paying special attention to new spiritual perspectives and insights into life which came to them as their minds opened to God and to the Christian Gospel. Time was given for quiet reflection, for two conditions were indispensable in effective Bible study: openness to God, and obedience to His call when it was heard. Vocation came from willing hearts faced by open doors, to be followed by decision, as the human response to Divine challenge.

Afternoons were given to practical work, and amongst other activities, teams would go on village visitation, keeping the life and fellowship of the school relevant to that of the neighbourhood in which it functioned. Later, from time to time, the Hwochow compound became the scene of special conferences and retreats, when neighbours, proud parents and village leaders would come to stay

for a day or two. On such days, 'old girls', now perhaps wives and mothers, would return to the school with great delight, and it was only when the gong sounded the 'lights out' that the hubbub of healthy living would cease for the day.

This Hwochow picture would not be complete, however, without mention of the starting of a women's opium refuge in the town, where a Chinese woman was put in charge, appropriately named 'Mother Ma'.

To quite a few of the ordinary women inhabitants of Hwochow – always curious and intrigued by the presence in their midst of the 'Three Spinsters' – a visit to the foreigners at the China Inland Mission was a real day out. For the Trio the frequency and variety of these encounters were a preparation for years still undreamed of, when they would spend their lives meeting new people daily in the distant Gobi Desert.

In Old China, names of animals were sometimes given to children in order to convince the spirits that the children were unimportant and therefore not worthy of attention. One of the neighbours of the Trio was a woman known as 'Goat's Mother', whose family and friends were as inquisitive, as their children were numerous. When she came to see the school on visitors' day, her son always came too. 'Little Goat' himself was five years old. He wore a bright yellow cotton jacket, on which were drawn in bold Chinese characters the outlines of every known species of insect in that neighbourhood – centipedes, scorpions, beetles. On his right shoulder was stitched a tiny pair of red and green trousers, to protect him from measles. His yellow coat was an insurance against stings and bites, and the heavy padlock suspended from a silver chain around his neck was to ensure long life.

One day, Little Goat, Goat's Mother and her party hobbled up the few steps of the Trio's house on their tiny bound feet, to seat themselves exhaustedly in a compound guest-room, which was furnished quite simply in Chinese style. Tea was officially offered them, but they could not be pressed to take refreshment, for the Trio knew that they would neither eat nor drink in a foreign house, lest by some magical spell they be turned into Christians. The visitors took little notice of the room furnishings, except to comment on the cleanliness of it all. Their main remarks were rather more personal. The first question concerned one of the Trio: 'Have you turned sixty yet?' Goat's Mother, being a fairly frequent visitor, was the proud possessor of valuable information on that subject, and she promptly assured her friends: 'She's not forty yet! It's her white hair that makes her look old.'

'Can my friends see where you sleep?' she asked. 'Also, can they see your little iron-tailor?' (by which she meant the sewing-machine). 'Can they hear your music box? Can they see the huge iron saucepan in which you cook food for the school?' . . .

To such questions the assurance was given that they could see all, but first their attention was directed to pictures on the wall of the guest-room, which illustrated New Testament events . . .

When much had been seen and nearly all questions answered, Little Goat, by now quite bored, gave a yell of impatience and the party left with the injunction from their hostesses: 'Now, do walk slowly, and do come back on Sunday.' Some of their visitors said they would come back to the service on Sunday, others were heard deeply discussing what possible future the Trio could have in their old age, when they had neither husband nor son. As they left, a second group of visitors would arrive. Sometimes, a few days after such a visit, or it may be a few years, one of the visitors would return, perhaps alone, to ask: 'What was it you said about Jesus of Nazareth?'

Mildred's medical training was extremely useful, and there was a small crowd each day at the Compound dispensary. A mother brings her child, scalded months before; a young woman arrives with T.B. — scourge of bleak North China, and known locally as 'the hundred-days-illness'; children are vaccinated; teeth are extracted, and many imaginary ailments cured. 'Well,' says one patient, 'if there's nothing wrong with me, please wash out my ears.' Patients increase, and dispensary helpers are trained. Normal students are given practical instruction in first aid, home nursing and dietetics.

The school now occupies four courts, and pupils' ages range from tiny tots of five to young women of twenty. There are a dozen or more teachers on the staff — all Christians. Mildred is Principal, assisted by Francesca, with an outstanding Chinese teacher, Ling Ai, as Vice-Principal. Sometimes, as Mildred looks around at the weekly staff meeting, she thinks: How different they all are — the kindly one, who would never 'drive' a rebellious child; the Puritan, who brooks no exception to school rules; the perky one, who would even point out the illogicality of the Principal herself if ever she made exceptions; the forthright; the easy-going, even-tempered one; the born leader; the less reliable one . . . 'As for myself,' she wrote to friends, 'the loyalty, love and unity of my band of fellow-workers is a joy and crown. Ling Ai and I realise how much we have to thank God for in the friendliness of their mutual relationships . . .' Here, surely, was a new kind of community. Their pupils came from

every section of society and from widely separated villages. Some were local girls, others came from distant provinces, even as far away as the borders of Mongolia.

When the school year closed in June, all returned home for the wheat harvest, where wives and daughters alike must fulfil the obligations to their home, but when September came round, joyously they returned, by cart, donkey, litter, or on foot.

'I hear your uncle has small-pox?' Fragrant Incense is asked when she returns.

'Nothing to speak of,' she replies.

'Have you been to the house?'

'Oh, a few times,' comes the reply from the girl, who can see no connection between an attack of 'heavenly blossoms' and coming back to school. To have small-pox was 'to blossom flowers'. To be vaccinated was 'to grow flowers' . . .

Fragrant Cloud is a strong, robust young woman.

Pear Drops is a humorous little mimic.

Already at the age of five, Goodness is bold and forthright, and will pick up a grub on the compound floor or maybe someone's new handkerchief, and rush with it to show the Principal. Her really serious offence caused a scandal throughout the whole kindergarten. At the Sunday service she actually decided to help herself to five 'cash' from the collection plate when it was handed to her! All were dutifully 'shocked'; nevertheless, she was very popular, and they all knew her family background. Her parents had not wanted her, and one day a missionary had found her as a tiny babe, buried alive. Only with difficulty had her life been saved.

Then there was Butterfly. She was sent to the Principal for using bad language. Certainly, she had been very frank with her friend. 'Chrysanthemum', she had said, 'you walk like a hopping frog.' But there was more to it than that, for in China, to compare a person to an animal is magic, and could mean a curse.

In the school tuckshop materials of all kinds were on sale: felt for making Chinese shoes; hemp for making string to attach the soles to the uppers; silk for embroidery; needles, safety pins, chalk to whiten calico socks, and acacia pods, the beans of which served as soap. 'No Credit' was the rule. The basic needs of the vast majority of mankind are not extravagant, and in Hwochow, a bowl with a pair of chop-sticks represented the total table requirements for each girl. Her bed consisted of a cotton-wadded quilt and a small bran-stuffed pillow. But each week a thousand pounds of flour and a hundred pounds of vegetables were needed to feed them all.

Hard work was the rule of that little community, but it was accompanied by gaiety and a sense of belonging. Horizons widened every day, and throughout there was an essential unity: the central place being given to worship and the study of the life of Christ . . . Over the years, relays of pupils: children and adults, bands of workers, wives and mothers would return to their villages to help build up a new China.

And how necessary it was. 'For almost every woman in this land,' wrote Mildred Cable, 'tragedy is interwoven with life. There is disappointment at her birth, and recognition only in her value as a family drudge. It is when she becomes the mother of a son that she is worth the clothes she wears and the food she eats. Even the ethics of Confucianism recognise no higher position for women than one of obedient dependence. In youth she must be subject to her father, in middle-age to her husband, and in old age to her son, yet the revolutionary power of Christianity is establishing a new social order, and in the Christian community one sees a girl welcomed in babyhood, cared for in childhood, receiving honour in her womanhood when she becomes a bride, and sometimes, indeed, I have been amazed at the sacrifices made by even poor parents for their daughters. I have known a father, too poor to afford a donkey, carry his little girl nearly thirty miles to our school. Another father gave the only bed-covering in the home for the use of his child during term, and still another endured the winter cold with the scantiest clothing, that his child might be warmly clad.'

In the joys and sorrows of so many lives the Trio found opportunity as well as strain. At any hour of the day, but preferably after dark (when it was easy for a girl to knock unseen at the study door), a quiet voice might be heard asking, 'Has the teacher time to let me speak to her?' Perhaps the child had come to say she had received a letter that she was to be betrothed, or maybe, her brother had been put in prison for political ideas, or perhaps it was just that she hoped that the teacher could find a job for one of her family. Sometimes it was one of the staff, a Chinese teacher, who would come when all the pupils were in bed. A Christian father had relapsed into opium smoking: 'How can I hope to influence my scholars when this sin is in my own home?' In a case where the mother of one of her best teachers had fallen into the opium habit, and as a result, even worse things, Mildred, with keen perception, wrote: 'I know that in such cases this is often a spiritual crisis for a young woman when, in the thick darkness, she will either meet with God or perhaps lose the hope whereby we are saved.'

And there was the local church. Its Pastor was Chinese and it was self-governing, but some help was expected. Mr. Nieh, for example, was a man of ability and wide influence. He had given up opium-smoking under Pastor Hsi years before. He was a good preacher, too, and men had even turned to him in the Boxer troubles. Then somehow or other spiritual decay had set in. Was it the prestige of his influence in the locality that had turned his head? Or had his love of popularity and power been too heavy a burden for his spiritual resources? In any case, the light had gone from his eyes and he was back again on the opium.

There was Puppy's Mother, too, who had lived at the C.I.M. compound gate ever since there had been a gate there. Known to three generations of missionaries, she had been dressmaker to them all, yet she still remained outside. And how she loved to gossip, however untrue she knew the stories about the foreign women to be. 'There is little attraction to repent,' she told one of the Trio's Chinese friends, 'if going to Heaven means associating with foreigners for all eternity.' Later, and after a long and painful illness, she softened considerably, and one day confided to the Trio that she had tried to pray but couldn't quite remember the sentences they had taught her.

Then there was Mrs. Deh, a woman opium smoker, who in endeavouring to raise money for more opium sank into a woman's degradation. For three years she had actually lived in the Mission Compound, yet it was to no avail. She had a lovely daughter, and it was only in the prayers of her pure daughter, who longed for her mother's release from the drug habit, that the Trio saw any hope for her.

'Like the Apostle of old,' wrote Mildred Cable, 'the missionary must be ready to receive all who come.'

'To give and not to count the cost,
To fight and not to heed the wounds,
To toil and not to seek for rest,
To labour and not to ask for any reward,
Save that of knowing that we do Thy Will.'

But this *was* life! . . .

'If I were abandoned on a raft in mid-Atlantic,' wrote Eric Gill, 'I would still thank God for *Life*.'

6 - THE LAUGHING TRIO

EVA was still concentrating on village work, and sometimes the other two would travel with her, generally during the school holidays. It was a very real help to have them with her, and the Chinese were always interested on their arrival. The Trio became known picturesquely as the Grey Lady (Eva), the Blue Lady (Mildred) and the Brown Lady (Francesca). 'How old are you?' 'How many children have you?' 'Do you really mean to say that you have no husband? Then what were your parents doing?' Eva spoke Chinese well, and she could supply all the answers.

Sometimes they visited the village where Mildred, in her early linguistic efforts, had tried to tell the folk that she was twenty-two years of age, but had actually informed them that she had a family of twenty-two, which had caused some little surprise! Sometimes, too, in a home or inn, when they thought they were alone, an inquisitive eye would be detected peering through a spot in the paper windows of their room made transparent by placing the tongue against it.

When their journeys were arduous or very long it was essential to have transport, and they would hire donkeys or mules. They rather rebelled at having to ride at all, but frequently had to accept the inevitable. So with clothes and literature tied in large handkerchiefs and distributed carefully around one of the patient beasts, they would start off, a wadded quilt being placed on each animal, and on top of that, a sleeping-bag, almost touching the ground at each side. Upon this, each precariously perched on her own beast, they felt like the wobbling hump of an Arabian dromedary, for there were neither reins nor harness to hold on to. They were 'Victorians', but even under these conditions there were no suggestions that they should ride side-saddle. To 'stay put' in such a position for ten or more miles a day, even with intermittent periods for walking and talking, was no mean test of physical endurance as well as skill. Sometimes the donkey would be knee-deep in a stony stream; at other times, passing along narrow roads between walls of tall corn, a fierce sun could bake you like an oven. At night, when the beasts had been watered and fed, all would be quiet, and the three women would stay with a Christian family in a cool cave-home cut into the side of a cliff. Or they might lodge in a Chinese inn - occasionally alongside some opium-drunk woman. But through it all they were meeting people - which was what mattered. Almost

always there was a welcome from the courteous, warmhearted Chinese people, and the three travellers became well known in the villages for their religion, their celibacy and their sense of humour. Generally there would be someone or some happening in each village which would stimulate Mildred's hearty laugh, Eva's smile, and Francesca's quiet twinkle. There was the village ne'er-do-well, for example (sometimes a Christian!), whose outlook was always jaundiced, whose debts were never paid, and to whom alms were always welcome. Looking a picture of virtue and sweet innocence, he would counsel them: 'Fear not, the Lord will provide.' On such occasions the Trio would laughingly recall an appropriate Bible text: 'Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin'; or, 'Work not for the bread which perisheth.' On Sundays, they would listen to village sermons by Chinese pastors in the little chapels or homes of the countryside, and would learn much in the art of Biblical exposition. The prodigal son, for instance, 'smoked opium in the far country'. The moral of another story was drawn, not from the widow's faith in the promise of Elisha that her cruse of oil would be inexhaustible, but from the fact that in her willingness to obey God's prophet, *her* 'cruse of oil' had been a successful borrowing expedition amongst generous neighbours when she was already heavily in debt. The impossibility of a man trying to serve two masters was driven home by the story of a sick patient who did not obey his doctor and took only half the prescribed dose of medicine. 'I am much worse since I took your medicine,' he told the doctor on his next visit. 'How terrible!' replied the doctor in irony. 'Do you not realise that your illness is due to parasites eating up your vitals, and that the medicine would have killed them all? But you only took half the dose and that just sent the parasites to sleep. They woke up refreshed and lively, and now they won't be trapped by that medicine a second time . . . You'd better go home and prepare for a long, lingering death.'

Their visits were not restricted, however, to Chinese peasants in villages surrounding Hwochow. At the heart of each Chinese community in that pre-revolutionary era there was always a Manchu Mandarin living at the *yamen*, a sort of Magistrate's residence, together with a court-house. The Mandarin was addressed as the 'Father of the People', and was the Chief Magistrate, whose word, smile, or frown could be indicative of the kind of justice which would be meted out. Men knelt in his august presence. Every few years, as a sort of District Officer or Resident Commissioner, he

would be moved on with his retinue of secretaries, servants and attendants, to be replaced by another team of authority.

Two of the Trio had now spent long enough in China to feel that Eastern etiquette was becoming second nature to them. Indeed, all their lives, they were punctilious about courtesy in dealing with people, and extremely sensitive to atmosphere. But amongst China Inland Missionaries and Chinese Christians, anything like a court case or an appeal to the law was discouraged, so the Trio and the Christian flock normally had few contacts with Hwochow officials, the Magistrate and his entourage – though naturally they observed the necessary official etiquette and respect due to the Establishment. Nevertheless, there are factors in life which upset man's calculations, and toothache happens to be one of them. But toothache is not *official* – though it can sometimes concern what in the East is called 'face'! So when toothache concerned the chief wife of the Chief Magistrate of Hwochow, it caused no little disturbance in his household, and even became something of a social problem in the *yamen*. Thus it came about that Mildred was called to the Mandarin's home and to his chief wife.

'If it suited her convenience,' said the official messenger, 'she would be conveyed to the Official Residence to give her professional help.' So to the *yamen*, in an elegantly upholstered cart, she went, with a lady-in-waiting in attendance, followed by other magisterial retainers and an outrider dressed in a scarlet-tasselled hat. As the little procession wended its way over the stony streets of the city, the thought flashed through Mildred's mind, How different it was from wobbling on the summit of an upholstered donkey, perched on a quilted sheet and sleeping-bag. On the way, groups of people who were making their way to hear law cases at the court-house, scattered in front of them, as the driver wheeled in and out, importantly cracking his whip. Market-women selling cooked foods by the roadside dived for cover; men taking their meal in the street, with bowl and chopsticks under unified command pushing food into open mouths, fell off their stools into the open drain at the side of the road. It was quite an event. The procession turned into the inner court of the *yamen* with a swish, and suddenly came to a stop. One of Mildred's most ornate visiting cards was sent in to the Mandarin's ladies, while she, waiting in an outer hall, observed the villainous-looking instruments of 'justice' hanging on the walls. Presently, into the private apartments of the women she went – forceps and all. Brilliant butterfly gowns flitted hither and thither, and a wife of lower rank conducted her to the wife of highest estate. Mildred

bowed and respectfully removed her glasses. Sugared tea, flavoured with rose-leaves and nuts, was then served, and to Mildred, seated in the half-light of the room, the carpets, felts, Chinese tapestries, all of vivid scarlet, were a real picture. The usual formal questions were asked and answered about her age, her family and her country of origin – but no one dared to mention so ignoble a subject as toothache! Mildred at last decided that it was the moment to speak about the reason for her visit, and finally she managed to persuade the Mandarin's wife to open her mouth. On examination she found the tooth was loose, and recommended its extraction. At this stage in the drama great comfort was necessary, so great comfort was duly administered to the patient by the younger women, who covered her eyes to protect her from life's realities – the forceps . . . And then: 'How wonderful!' they all exclaimed. The tooth was out! In describing this scene Mildred wrote: 'After such a surgical triumph, on our next visit to our new-found friends, long-neglected and half-forgotten pains were discovered by them all!'

On her next visit to the *yamen* ladies Mildred talked about why she had gone to China, and about her religion. Later, she discovered that the Mandarin's head cook had been put into a cell because he had not taken the trouble to find out before her visit what food she liked. Though there may be no historic connection between these two events, the said cook, later turned up as a patient in the opium refuge.

The day came when the Mandarin's ladies officially returned Mildred's visit. They came to the Mission compound, fluttering with excitement, for it was the first time in their three years' stay in Hwochow that they had been outside their own courtyard. At such an important event the Trio, too, were excited. As they could not compete with the splendour of the Mandarin's *ménage*, or his Chinese menu, they fell back on what they described as an 'English dinner-party', of the details of which unfortunately no record seems to have survived, though the following items were included in the menu:

Salmon (decorated with tinned sardines)

Jelly (multi-coloured)

Diced Plum Pudding (the only tin left in the C.I.M. larder)

Légume Salad (Spinach, beetroot, carrot and yam, well disguised with cochineal)

'Conversation' followed:

'Does the sun ever shine in England?' asked the chief wife, with great prescience.

'I hear it is a land of shades.'

'Are you not homesick?'

'That spotted webbing which Western women wear over their faces. Might it be to aid their eyesight, or to conceal their features?'

Questions then turned to other things. They discussed the tiny feet of Chinese children and the whole custom of foot-binding, which, just about that time, had been forbidden by a new Decree. 'Alas!' said the chief wife, who as a ruling Manchu did not have bound feet, 'Our people are not so easily governed as yours, where parents are sent to prison if their children are not vaccinated.'

And so the years passed . . .

It was 1911, and the last occasion on which they visited the Manchu ladies. On a beautiful evening, lit by a bright Chinese moon, huge lanterns had been set to guide their path through the great gates of the *yamen*. But on that same night, the revolution against the Manchu dynasty broke.

The Mandarin himself was away from home, and his ladies were terrified—so frightened, indeed that, they fled to the Mission compound for safety. When the Chief Magistrate returned, he was dragged through the streets of Hwochow by an angry populace. This was the end, and in that same year, Manchu power in China was broken for ever, and a Republic declared, with Sun Yat Sen as its first President.

CHINA IN REVOLUTION

7—THE REPUBLIC

WHEN the Revolution broke, the Trio were about due for leave, so they decided to return to Britain until things settled down. Dis-satisfaction in 1900 had found an outlet in violence against the foreigner. Now in 1911, it was the turn of the Manchu dynasty. Would this movement, too, take an anti-foreign turn? It was an open question, and a military commander in the neighbourhood was so unsure about the outcome that he provided himself with two badges—one representing each side. So for safety, the girls in the school returned to their villages and the Trio themselves began to pack.

The nearest railway was five days away by litter, along a bleak wind-swept road, and it was with considerable relief that early one morning they climbed into a third-class compartment at the station, and noted with satisfaction that the train already had steam up and was due to leave at 9 a.m. The party now consisted of twenty foreigners.

After several hours' wait, the train had not started, and Chinese servants who had accompanied their masters left in disgust, saying: 'A train is a handsome enough thing to look at, but give us a cart.' When afternoon came, the train finally made a start, and the foreign party had the distinction of being escorted by a young man who had just been appointed Secretary of the Foreign Office in the provincial capital. Having been a piano tuner for a foreign firm, he understood a little English. When they had travelled some miles, a rumour began to spread amongst them that a battle was in progress further down the line, and this proved to be the case, for the engine was taken from their train to be used for military purposes. Their party was shunted into a disused railway siding. The Secretary of the Foreign Office was thoughtful, however. He provided them with hard-boiled eggs and some biscuits—then he, too, vanished. For four nights and four long days, with other trains thundering past them along the main line, they were marooned in their third-class carriage.

Then news filtered through that a crack revolutionary 'dare-to-

die' regiment had gone forward to crush the Imperial Manchu Forces, but twelve hours later the same regiment came rushing back, saying: 'If we had stayed there longer, we should have been dead men – *bullets* were falling amongst us.'

In the siding, not far away from the foreign party, three railway trolleys had been left on the line, so on the fourth day, cold, hungry and deserted, they decided to take matters into their own hands, and for the next two days, they sped the trolleys along the railway line, sometimes racing, plus baggage, down sloping tracks, at other times crawling up gradients. Occasionally, they passed over light bridges spanning deep chasms, through tunnels, and even over some tracks which were said to be mined. There were blockages en route too – one, indeed, a broken-down engine. Finally, having by-passed the main fighting line, they came into what was still Imperial territory under the Dragon Flag of Old China, to find ample signs of war-wrecked property amidst heaps of rubble. At long last, the party reached Tientsin, to be welcomed by the cheers of a friendly group who had been anxiously awaiting them for days.

And so began the Trio's return to Europe for leave. But their hearts were still in China . . . What was happening there?

As Eva French had done after the Boxer rising, so in 1912, in the very week that the British Minister issued passports for women to enter Shansi, the Trio returned to their work to find many changes and the Revolution well under way . . . Starting on time, the train seemed to speed along much more quickly by comparison with their former journey. But in many ways it was a strange country to which they returned. There were now five colours in the Republican flag – red for Chinese Provinces, yellow to represent Manchuria, blue for Mongolia, Ili, and Chinghai, white for Sinkiang and black for Tibet. To cut off the Manchu-imposed pigtail was the outward sign of emancipation, and at Taiyuanfu, Shansi, they found that no man wearing a queue was permitted to enter the city. If an older Chinese attempted to enter with a queue, soldiers promptly produced a pair of scissors to clip it off. Some were cautious, and though they showed no queue, kept their hair long, falling about their shoulders, or held in place by a comb, or a metal strip cut from a petrol can. 'Who knows?' they said. 'Today we lose our tails, maybe tomorrow, our heads.' Everything now on sale seemed to be marked 'Republican' – from flashy buttons to editions of new books. Lengths of cloth were stamped as being 'Patriotic'. Such were some of the visible signs of the awakening of China.

As in every revolution, there were many 'Proclamations'. The Army, these said, was now to be viewed as being a more honourable profession, no longer ranking below that of the scholar, the farmer, the artisan or the trader. The population was to dress soberly: grey or khaki clothes for men, no silver ornaments for women. There was to be no music at weddings or funerals, and brides were not to wear embroidered gowns. One innovation the Trio most heartily agreed with: women were to unbind their feet – a policy always followed in their school. In the future, too, there were to be no 'unlucky' days – either in planning weddings, funerals or even in repairing the kitchen stove. The signs of the Zodiac were at a discount, and the astrologers and fortune-tellers were to be put out of a job. The Western calendar was to replace the Chinese – a proclamation which upset school terms, family gatherings, and the annual settlement of debts in the Chinese new year. Many of these innovations survived for only twelve months.

In Shansi Province, the new Mandarin was now Chinese, not Manchu, and contrary to general custom, he was a local man. Instead of being carried in a sedan chair, he walked. He wore cotton cloth instead of gorgeous silk, and when he invited the Trio to dine with his wives, the invitation was printed on foreign card. This time there were no outriders or lady-in-waiting to accompany the guests. The Mandarin's ladies were attired in severe black; teacups were of plain white china, decorated oddly enough, with bunches of forget-me-nots and bearing the words 'A Present for a Good Boy'. The beautifully polished table was covered by a piece of white calico; knives and forks took the place of chopsticks, and enamelled basins replaced the lovely flowered china. Cigarettes were passed round instead of the usual Chinese water-pipe, and great surprise was expressed when the Trio did not smoke. The novelty of the scene was complete when the Mandarin brought out a gramophone and conversation was drowned by records of London's popular songs.

When he brings release from some crippling practice, like the bound feet of the Chinese women, why does the reformer, including sometimes the Christian reformer, so often feel that he must banish also the fun and gaiety and beauty from life? Is it from fear of reaction, or from a sense of guilt? Whatever its cause, the attitude is not Christian.

In China, one thing was now certain: change had come. The West had done its work. Isolation had been destroyed, taboos undermined, and traditions challenged; the crust of age-old custom over one-fifth of the human race was broken. Sadly, too, internal unity

had gone, and from that day forward, for forty years, there was civil war. The Three Women were to know insecurity, hardship and great danger. 'Our political horizon has been draped in storm-clouds ever since 1911.' they wrote a few years later: 'Nevertheless, this great Nation, permeated with ideals, so free from sordidity, will surely carve for herself a future worthy of her past.'

And the churches in China were to share this spirit. At a Conference of missionaries held in Shanghai in 1919 at which the Trio were present, the Chinese delegates made their presence felt. The Trio wrote: 'The Chinese delegates formed a most interesting group of men . . . and the last hours of the Conference brought us face to face with a situation and a statement by the Chinese which should cause us to consider our ways.'

'Courteously, kindly but immovably, they gave the Conference to understand that the day when they could be treated as children was past, the upshot of it being that they called on the China Christian Council to alter its policy and to form a new Committee on which the Chinese should have equal representation . . . This Committee will have authority until a National Christian Council can be formed . . . A Chinese has been appointed convenor of it.'

8—A WAKING GIANT

FOR nearly three hundred years, under the Manchu régime, China had been a feudal state; a self-contained, self-satisfied unity centred in Peking with an easy-going decentralisation in her sprawling Provinces. Her culture was something to be proud of, though modern scientific achievement was sadly lacking. At the time of the appointment of the first British Ambassador, by Prime Minister Pitt, though she had a century-old treaty with Russia, China was profoundly ignorant of the world beyond. The Emperor recorded: 'The King of the red-haired English sent his envoy . . . Now England is paying homage: my Ancestors' merit and virtue have reached their distant shores.'

A few generations later, in China as in the rest of Asia and almost the whole of Africa, ancient creed and time-honoured custom were challenged by pressures from the West—including the spread of the Christian Mission. 'Had we left them alone,' wrote Wendell Wilkie in his book *One World*, 'we would not now have needed to worry, but we didn't leave them alone.'

China's awakening to both the alien Manchu and to the West, and

her re-assertion of nationhood, were seen in the Taiping rising (in the 1850's), the Boxer troubles (1900), and now in the birth of a Republic. In 1912, Sun Yat Sen wrote: 'In China today there is no Emperor. In his place stand the four hundred millions of the people.' His Three Democratic Principles on which the National Government was later founded, were 'Nationalism, Democracy and the Livelihood of the People', And as a sample of Christian optimism at that time, on 27th January, 1912, an American missionary wrote describing a mass gathering of Chinese Christians held in Peking, which had received a message from the President of the New Republic, in reply to which, the meeting sent a loyal greeting: 'Ten thousand years to the Republic. Ten thousand years to the President. Ten thousand years to the Church of Christ.' The missionary's comment read: 'As I sat there and listened to the patriotic speeches and hymns and prayers, and looked at the two thousand Christians . . . I wished that those old heroes, Xavier and Morrison, could have walked into that Church and felt with us the thrill of the new hope . . .'*

Today, we know that China's revolutions were far from over, but at that time the Trio did not know, and anyway, their trials were more than enough. The walls of their school buildings were scored with threats from brigands or bandits, accompanied by sketches of drawn daggers, with phrases such as : '*White Wolf* is a devourer of foreigners and of sheep.' Mildred wrote mildly that local plans were 'liable to disintegration', but that 'disturbance was in the mind of the people'.

With the Manchu yoke broken, Mohammedan rebellions started up in far Turkistan, and Mongolian raids in the north. Brigandage, and a long run of independent War Lords, more or less set the pace of life for the next thirty years, and there was no real peace. At one time, hopes were raised by such people as General Feng Yu Hsiang, sometimes called the 'Christian General'. The rise to power of the Soong family was a steady factor for some years — one of them married Dr. Sun Yat Sen, another married Chiang Kai Shek, a third married Dr. Kung, and a brother was in the Chinese Cabinet. But troubles continued, and with nation-wide problems such as poverty, illiteracy, landlordism, the lack of technical experts and financial backing, even Sun Yat Sen himself slowly lost confidence in the prospect of Western help. He called in Russia. So it was that

* 'In no other twenty-year period did Christianity make as rapid an advance as from 1900 to 1920 . . . Protestant converts increased from 95,943 to 366,524. A total of 337 mission stations were started.' P. A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese and Diplomats*, Princeton University Press.

Borodin came to Canton. Thus passed a second great opportunity for Western powers to co-operate with new and friendly forces in awaking China: the first in 1850 with the Taiping revolt, now the second under Dr. Sun Yat Sen – both awakenings influenced by Christianity.

In Shansi Province, where the Trio lived, Yen Hsi Shan became known as a model governor, and he set forth excellent aims for the Revolutionary Party: schooling for all, the unbinding of women's feet, and an opium-free Province – things which the Trio had dreamed of. He, too, met inertia amongst the peasant people, and was beset by so many problems, that Bunyan-like, he named some of his new towns 'Cities of Overcoming Difficulties'. Another leader, Dr. Hu Shih, a graduate of Columbia and Cornell Universities, in 1917 launched a campaign for a 'literary revolution', with the use of phonetic Chinese, instead of the old classical, cumbersome orthography. His aim was to lead China into a wider cultural outlook – including Western literature. The Christian Church had prepared the way, and for many years prior to the coming of the Republic the churches of Europe and America had poured out millions of money in the founding of schools and colleges, the maintenance of excellent training hospitals, and on a certain amount of social work.

But other Western influences, too, were active. Dr. Hu Shih advocated secular humanism, and by 1917, Bertrand Russell from Britain, and John Dewey from the United States, had been invited to tour Chinese Universities. Later still, in 1920, the *Communist Manifesto* was translated into Chinese, and in 1921 the Chinese Communist Party was founded, with Mao Tse Tung a member. Dual membership of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party was possible for several years.

In 1924, Sun Yat Sen – a lover of democracy – was still bravely battling with the problems of this giant-land, and pleading with the Chinese people to take their destiny into their own hands. 'We pledge ourselves,' he passionately declared, 'with the support of the people, increasingly to struggle for Chinese independence, freedom and unity. Masses of the people, Awake! Arise!'

A year later, Sun Yat Sen died, and Chiang Kai Shek, one of his associates, came to power. Vainly he endeavoured to bring the War Lords on whom he was partially dependent, to heel. In 1927 he dismissed the Russian advisers, some of whom crossed the western desert, returning to their own country, while others lingered in the western hills. Chiang next fought the Chinese Communist forces, but with nearly a million men in his army, and after years of

struggle, he failed to obtain decisive unity and victory – mainly because of Japan's imperialist thrust into Manchuria. Then, after ten years' hard life in the hinterland of Hunan, a Chinese Communist army slipped out of Chiang's trap. In the now famous 'long march' under the redoubtable Mao Tse Tung, they trekked six thousand miles in two hundred and sixty-five days, fighting over two hundred skirmishes on the way. Ninety thousand Communists are said to have started on the trek. 'When at last they came on to the Kansu plain, their numbers had been cut to seven thousand.'* Finally, uniting with local Communist forces, twenty thousand arrived at Yen-an, where Mao set up his headquarters.

Land-hungry, over-populated Japan had invaded Manchuria – partly in fear of Russian penetration and partly copying Western imperialism. Unrest continued, to be followed by the Second World War, which brought the China-giant once and for all into the centre of the power politics of the world. It ended with the Chinese Communist forces in the ascendant against Chiang's National Government – now grown weak, corrupt and dictatorial.

During all this time, the Three Women had carried on with their work in Hwochow, improvising, gradually expanding, and watching the signs of the times.

For the ten years following the 1911 Revolution, the Hwochow schools had continued to grow under Mildred and Francesca, while village work expanded under Eva. As early as 1909, on a visit to England, Mildred had talked with insight about their work to some of her friends: 'The purpose of our Bible School and Teacher Training is that China must be evangelised by her own people,' she had said. 'Our duty, where there are Christians, is to teach and train them that they might teach others – particularly those who cannot come to Hwochow Central School. In the Normal School, we are preparing young women for teaching in mission schools, in order that they may be faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ.' In the C.I.M. Conference at Shanghai in 1922, we hear Mildred pleading for more schools. 'We lack leaders because we have not gone in for schools as we ought.' She tells her colleagues, 'From Hwochow School, fifty teachers are in Mission schools and seventy in Government schools, but educational work, apart from the Spirit of God, is of no avail.'

The conviction behind the various departments in their Hwochow education was that religion – the relationship to God and to one's

* Snow, *The Other Side of the River*, Gollancz.

neighbour – was an essential part of any society. With the help of a growing Chinese staff, the variety of courses, in addition to Bible study, included: mathematics, music, practical subjects specially designed for women, pedagogics (with teaching practice in the villages and the town), the history of European civilisation, including the French Revolution (Shades of Genevan Rousseau and Volt-*aire!*), physiology, zoology and chemistry. On the literary side, emphasis was put on the writing of essays on diverse subjects, some of which were correlated with the Chinese classics, a typical example being a saying of Confucius: 'The Path may not be left for an instant; if it could, it would not be the Path.' There were also voluntary activities, including a debating society.

It was now fifteen years since Eva and Mildred had become partners in Hwochow, and from 1917 onward, the Trio had begun to ask some serious questions. Was not the period since missionaries had first established work in Hwochow (thirty years) sufficient to have established a self-propagating Church, independent of foreigners? They realised that there had been many difficulties; the Boxer suffering had caused great losses and they must not therefore be too hasty in leaving total responsibility to the Chinese Church. But due perhaps to the rising national spirit around them, they felt that missionaries must not be so tenacious of their power as to make Chinese Christians feel that in order to secure freedom and local control of Church affairs, they needed to start independent sects. The Trio were now more firmly convinced than ever that Chinese Christians must take precedence, and in advice to young missionaries contemplating going to China, they made this abundantly plain: 'Come to China as learners and Chinese people who were Christians before you were born will give you the benefit of their ripe experience. If you are worthy of it, they will also admit you to fellowship in service.'

Over the years, the Trio felt that in Hwochow they had been progressively breaking new ground, sowing seed, building up confidence between Chinese Christians and themselves. They had seen rapid development on every hand, but the winds of change were blowing hard in China, and in the Chinese Church, too. 'Now,' they felt, 'evangelisation and elementary teaching require no further foreign help,' although overseas workers were still necessary for teacher training and advanced education. At that time Mildred reported on the position in Hwochow: 'Pastor Wang and eight deacons give oversight to the Church in Hwochow numbering four hundred members, and they are responsible for services in eight out-stations,

in addition to running the boys' school and the opium refuge. A Chinese Evangelism Society has been founded with the object of opening up new districts, preaching at fairs, distributing Gospels and pamphlets, and the holding of preaching services in a hall in the centre of Hwochow City.' She mentioned in the same document that in the next city of Hungtung, there was a Higher Grade School for boys, and that there were elementary schools throughout the district. 'Overall policy was guided by a General Council which secured unity of action in all the far-reaching enterprises,' she said, though each local church remained independent and self-governing. 'Thus we believe the church has been rooted and established – whose seed is in itself.' At the Shanghai C.I.M. Conference of 1922, Mildred was emphatic about training leaders for the Chinese Church.

It is evident that the Three Women had been doing some hard thinking about the freedom and responsibility of the Chinese Church for its own affairs. Consequently, they were seriously wondering about their own place in the Hwochow work itself. It was possible to stay too long in one place. Had the time come for them to move to other fields? China was a big country. There were vast tracks of territory still awaiting the Gospel. The C.I.M. itself was deeply concerned with the work further afield in Kansu Province. The Trio also were deeply concerned about their own next phase. Whatever it was to be, caution was necessary and much seeking of guidance. Increasingly they were considering entry into an area of Central Asia – a territory without frontiers and a work whose results, anyway, would be elusive. In 1922 (at Shanghai), Mildred told the C.I.M. Conference: 'In principle we, as a Mission, purpose moving from our settled stations to unevangelised regions, but in practice, the time never seems to come. A missionary does not enter a district to settle permanently.'

The Trio were now in their forties and they had to decide whether they were equal to new work or whether they were already too old and should stay in Hwochow for the rest of their active lives. One could become 'stale' even in Christian service. There was also the subtle temptation of believing that one was indispensable, and that one's own successful methods were the only ones that would work. There was the spiritual pitfall of working from momentum rather than from inspiration – mistaking efficient organisation for vitality. Perhaps the greatest danger of all, over the years, was to lose clear sight of the reason why one had ever presumed to attempt to do God's work – which for the Trio had been the simple one of bringing

to Chinese women and girls, by word and deed, new life in Jesus Christ.

Was it better, then, for the church in Shansi that they go or that they stay in Hwochow? That was the question. In weighing it, subtle temptations of inclination might creep into their calculations. With the pioneering temperament of Eva and Mildred it had not been easy to 'stay put' for twenty years so near to an open road. Life had afforded a panorama of passing traders, pilgrims, adventurers – needy men and women of many faiths, ranging from spirit-worship to meditative Buddhism and dogmatic Islam: Turkis, Tibetans, Mongolians, Manchus, Chinese and Russians. All those living silhouettes passing their door were *people*, coming from or going to places where the insights and perspectives manifested in the selfless love of Jesus Christ had hardly ever been heard of. But they had stayed on . . . Then, unexpectedly, when they had begun to wonder about their future, letters were received from acquaintances who had actually been through Central Asia, telling them that with their long experience, and their knowledge of China, they *ought* to go.

European colleagues were dismayed: those in London, who had sent them out, and those on the field, who had seen the success, efficiency and results of a score of years of dedicated service. Here was something concrete: 'Fruits for your labour', they said, 'but out there, what?' Life beyond the Great Wall was just shifting sand – nomadic people. You can't build a church *there*. A hen cannot lay an egg on an escalator! This was 'enthusiasm gone mad', and, of course, 'old dogs could not learn new tricks'. And the Chinese Christians of Hwochow? Those former pupils, present pupils, prospective pupils . . . 'We know *you*, *you* know us. We trust you. Your ways are best – stay, and we will do anything you say.' (That was exactly the danger!) Some hearts were nearly broken at the thought of losing their beloved Teachers. The aged Pastor Wang had already suggested the desirability of acquiring a plot of land outside the city wall, where eventually the tombs of the beloved Trio could lie side by side with those of their Chinese pupils: The Grey Lady, The Blue Lady, The Brown Lady.

Were they mature or mad? Everyone wanted to believe, of course, that the Trio were mature people. But just how mature were they? Eva in her youth and after desperate heart-searching had, once and for all, made a final surrender, and she knew Who was her Master. In her diary, under one date, she had written: 'Born in Medea, May 27'. Under another date (twenty-one years later) she

had said: 'Born again'. Three years later, she had written : 'Went to China, September 1st'. And she had been proved by hardship and many a danger over the years — everyone knew. But she could be impulsive.

Mildred, when she had already decided to go to China, had faced what was, perhaps, the greatest test of her life. The news of the Boxer massacres in Shansi had come to her in Britain, and the first woman missionary to be murdered was the very woman who, years before, had spoken to her about the needs of China. This had brought home to her the tragic happenings. Friends had told her parents: 'No right-minded people would allow their daughter to go to such a land at such a time.' But physical danger had not daunted her. The real test had been much more subtle, and it had come soon after that news of the terrible Boxer events. She had become engaged to be married to a fellow missionary candidate. Together they had dreamed of joint happy service as man and wife. Even the tragic news from China had been discussed and shared with her fiancé . . . Then the blow fell! and it had been so deeply interwoven with events in China, and with her own personal affections and future life that, in her own words, it had been 'almost soul-shattering'. 'On a beautiful May morning,' she wrote, some years later, 'when the lilac was in bloom, there was put into my hands a letter in which was written that which made a goblin of the sun . . . Unless I was to deny my vocation, I must pursue my pathway *alone* . . . In one hour, the highest things of life burnt themselves to ashes.' The engagement was broken off. Such was the price that had been paid for her service to China.

After that, it had taken Mildred a long time to re-adjust her thinking and to regain the serenity and joy which was native to her temperament, but she had not wavered in her vocation. Her suffering had been intense, and for a time she had withdrawn within herself and taken on an unnatural reserve. Some of her friends had said: 'That day, she died.'

Then, quite suddenly, the political situation in China had seemed to clear, and on 25th September, Mildred was told that she could sail. It was a relief to be on her way — action in itself relieved the tension. Her father, sharing with her a deep understanding, accompanied her across the Atlantic to New York, and on the way he told her for the first time that when she had been a tiny child, in his own prayers, he had dedicated her to Christian work overseas. Yes, she was a mature person.

And what did Francesca think of the proposal to leave the Hwo-

chow school which she, too, had learned to love? As we know, she was a disciplined person, with a developed inner life. Not nearly so hearty or forthright as the other two, her spirit was of the quiet, even wistful kind. At heart, she was a poet, and in later years, almost all of the books they jointly wrote bore the marks of Francesca's art and fineness of spirit. Nevertheless, like her sister, she had a mind of her own, and if the occasion ever arose, her friends knew that she could not be 'pushed around', or driven into hasty decisions. Sometimes she would tell of a certain debating group which met in Richmond, Surrey, where she and her mother had lived after her father's death and before she had gone to China. On one occasion G. K. Chesterton had been the speaker for the motion. Francesca had found herself in hearty disagreement with him and had said so in no doubtful tones and to such effect that Chesterton, in replying, had remarked: 'The opposer of tonight's motion ought, in my opinion, to be burned for heresy at Smithfield!' In Hwochow, Francesca's contribution to the fellowship was reflection and spiritual judgment. She had shared in the school life of Hwochow for six fewer years than the other two, but with her temperament, the thought of parting must nevertheless have brought a pang. *Partir c'est mourir un peu*, says a European proverb, and with the rather clinging nature of Francesca, to leave the old familiar things and to contemplate the rigours of donkey-travel, grimy desert inns and an arid countryside as a new career must have made her cringe. But she was mature.

In 1920, they were due for furlough again, and though their minds were preoccupied with their future, they did not lose their sense of the human present. When, from the 'back of beyond' they arrived in fashionable flashy Shanghai to sail home, they wrote an amusing note to their friends at home (signing themselves 'The Hwochow Trio'): 'At Shanghai our first enquiry was for an efficient, up-to-date, smart-style tailor, who would outfit us at the shortest notice with suitable clothing! Two were forthcoming, and they quickly had in hand a coat and skirt for each of us and some smart "confections" suitable to our various proportions! Charming, stylish crêpe de chine gowns, clinging soft silk garments and practical serge dresses were soon keeping a workroom of men busy. At this particular juncture, Mildred began to reveal those peculiarly trying traits in her character which only seem to come to the surface when dress-making or millinery demand attention. Nothing would satisfy her but a dress, the bodice of which reached the rim of her chin, whilst

the skirt nearly touched the floor! As authorities on matters of fashion, she would quote people who, to our certain knowledge, had bought their last dress eight years previously! Compromises were eventually effected, whereby her dresses went shorter for each inch that Eva's lengthened . . . As regards millinery, Eva now sports a fashionable broad-brimmed silk hat, Francesca a fur toque, and Mildred is happy in a round felt hat of Asiatic origin!

So they took their furlough and returned to China, still preoccupied with their future work. For months they had waited for a clear sense of direction. Would they go? – or would they stay in Hwochow? The Chinese pastor sobbed like a child. The teachers pleaded with them. Would the closing school term be their last? The vivid bloom on the courtyard vine-tree – would they see it next summer?

'To say "goodbye" is to die a little', but to pray is to hold oneself consciously in the presence of God; to open one's whole self to God and to the claims of living. Then to *obey*. Finally, for our Trio, 'something happened'. The decision became clear to them all. The day came when they *knew*.

So months later, on 11th June, 1923, early on a bright mid-summer morning, they started out in peace for unknown Central Asia.

And one evening, many more months later, after long and arduous journeys, they found themselves peering into the darkness which spread across the wilderness of Central Asia. Wistfully they asked the young Chinese soldier guarding the Travellers' Gate in the Great Wall:

'Do many get lost in the Desert?'

'Very many,' came the reply. 'Some miss their way and die of thirst. Others are frozen to death in the night . . . Must you go into the Gobi?'

'Yes,' they quietly replied, 'we must, for we seek the lost and some of them are out there . . .'

But before we tell that story we must remind ourselves that there were other people besides the Trio who had been looking toward the Gobi Desert – indeed, long before them – and from the *other side*.

INTO THE HEART OF ASIA

9—RUSSIA LOOKS EAST

CENTRAL Asia is the place where Russia meets China, and if we would understand Asia at all, as we have looked at China, we must take a brief glance at Russia.

In her teens, Eva had built up a picture of Russia — exiles sent to Siberia by secret police; nihilists and anarchists; Czars silently extending their frontiers from the Near East to the Far East. But the Russian authors she had read afforded a glimpse of another Russia, mystical and rather sad, poor but pious. Little did she dream that forty years later, in the heart of Asia, she would find her work made possible — in part at least — by the dedicated translation work of Russian priests who had preceded her.

Russia was neither Eastern nor Western, Catholic nor Protestant. When, centuries before, Christian Constantinople had been taken by the Moslem Turks, and later still, when the Roman Church had been split by the Reformation, there were Russian Christians who had dreamed of Moscow, with its beautiful churches, as a 'Third Rome' — a centre of Christianity uniting East and West. In our first chapter, we saw something of this outlook in Soleviev, dreaming of a united Christendom. The translation of the Christian Scriptures into Russian or Slavonic had come neither from Catholic Rome nor Protestant Geneva, but from Greece, done in the ninth century by the brothers Cyril and Methodius, of Thessalonica. They had been missionaries to the Tartar people living to the north-east of the Black Sea, and the Cyrillic alphabet remains to this day the basic orthography of Russian literature.

Though Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Virgil, remained largely unknown, one could not really know Russia or read her classics without realising something of the dramatic impact on Russian life and letters over the centuries of the crucified Christ of the Gospels. Christian worship was conducted in the native speech of the Russian people, and Bible translators into their mother tongue had been prophets — not merely scholars. The words 'to be

baptised' translated into Slavonic, became 'to be crucified', and symbolically, the ceremony of initiation into Christianity meant 'the acceptance of one's cross of suffering and renunciation – to achieve through it regeneration and resurrection . . .'* The world a 'united Christendom'. 'Cross-bearing people'. What a splendid vision!

Early in the nineteenth century, Russia was turning more and more towards the West. Russian princes had intermarried with the royal houses of France, England, Hungary and Poland. There were increasing religious contacts, and even a growing evangelical movement amongst both the common people and the ruling classes in St. Petersburg. A sign of these growing relationships was an extraordinary incident which took place in Moscow in the eventful year 1812. In the August of that year, a Scot, John Paterson, was received in St. Petersburg by Prince Galitzin, the Russian Minister for Public Worship.† Paterson had gone to Russia with credentials from the British and Foreign Bible Society in London, but on the very day of his arrival Napoleon Bonaparte had also arrived in Russia, having reached Smolensk in his great but disastrous invasion. By the time that Paterson, with the blessing of Galitzin, had travelled on to Moscow, Napoleon was dejectedly walking amongst the smouldering ruins of the city, which, as part of their scorched-earth policy, had been deliberately fired by the Russians themselves. By 19th October, Napoleon had begun his terrible retreat, for the Russian winter had caught up with him.

The intrepid Scot, Paterson, however, was still in Moscow, and on 6th December, the Czar, Alexander I, consented to receive him – it was even said that the Czar had actually postponed for a brief period joining his armies (which were now in pursuit of the fleeing French Grand Army) to receive Paterson. The outcome of the interview between the Czar and the Scot was the foundation of a St. Petersburg Bible Society (later the Russian Bible Society), at a ceremony which took place in the presence of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Novogorod and St. Petersburg, Ministers of State, and various other religious leaders, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant. This event took place at the Palace of Prince Galitzin, who became the first President of the new Society. It was due to this Russian Bible Society and to groups which included Russian priests working in Asia, that, years later our Three Women were able to obtain

* Dr. Nicolas Zernov, *Moscow, The Third Rome*, S.P.C.K.

† *History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol. I, Canton.

some of the translations of the Gospels they needed for their work in the Gobi Desert.*

Russian colonial penetration had concentrated mainly on Northern Asia, and as far back as 1581 she had sent prisoners of war, convicts and adventurers across the Urals into Siberia, much as Britain (on a smaller scale) was to send convicts to the New World and to Botany Bay centuries later. Between 1662 and 1783, the Russian population in the bleak north of Asia had increased from 70,000 to a million, and while Britain and other West European nations had expanded westwards across the open seas which faced them, Russia had silently expanded to the east across the land-mass which was her only open door. Such was the speed of this expansion that while it took young, vigorous American colonists two hundred years to reach to their Pacific coast, the Russians, over longer distances crossed Asia in a hundred and twenty.†

The Russian State was of course, behind such expansion, and State-appointed chaplains were sent out to the new colonists. Happily some of the official chaplains did more than look after the spiritual needs of their own countrymen, and later, a Russian Missionary Society was founded to spread the Christian religion in Siberia. So for three hundred years Russians had carried Christianity to Northern Asia, and during the eighteenth century they reported converts amongst Buryats, Tungans and Yakuts. 'In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, not far from ninety thousand were baptised in Siberia amongst previously non-Christian peoples.'‡

By 1826, the Russian Bible Society had circulated a million Scriptures in thirty languages, most of which, of course, were in European Russia, but in Western Asia, too, priests had established schools and hospitals. Later still the Russian Archbishop of Tobolsk

* Stefan Lipzoff, for example, who had spent fourteen years studying the Manchu language for the Russian Government, worked on St. John's Gospel, and later a New Testament was printed in St. Petersburg. Scriptures in Kalmuk (Western Mongolian) and other languages were circulated in Asia by the Russian Bible Society. Marshall Broomhall, *The Bible in China*, British and Foreign Bible Society.

† The area covered by Russia in Asia was greater even than that of the British Empire, and over the years it had proceeded almost unnoticed, for she had met no other Great Power en route until (as we saw in the first chapter) she was faced by British influence in Afghanistan and later was checked in the Far East by Japan in 1905. Russian territory today covers one-sixth of the earth's surface, and from West to East, the distance from Moscow to the Bering Straits is further than that from London to Rhodesia. From north to south it is greater than the distance from London to Ottawa. Of 220 million people in Greater Russia, about one-third are of other races and languages. Russian Asia is twice the size of Chinese Asia, but contains only about one-third the number of people. Moreover, three-quarters of China is mountainous and more or less uncultivable. In recent times China is reported to have informed Russia that she does not consider the present frontiers of Russian Siberia are final.

‡ K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Eyre & Spottiswood.

sent a mission to the distant Altai Mountains bordering on Mongolia, and it was claimed that there were churches in some two hundred villages. Archbishop Macarius, of the Russian Missionary Society, compiled a dictionary and translated parts of the Bible and liturgy.

By this time, the London Missionary Society, and the Swedish Mongolian Mission had become interested in Northern Asia, and with the blessing of the same Czar, Alexander I, the London Missionary Society sent two of its servants, Edward Stallybrass and Cornelius Rahmn, who were Moravians, four thousand miles by sledge across Siberia to Mongolia. With two later recruits, William Swan and Roland Yuille, and the help of two Buryat lamas, they laboured for some twenty years translating parts of the Bible into classical Mongolian, which under the supervision of a Russian official, Schmidt, were printed in St. Petersburg.

Despite all this interest in Siberia and Mongolia, however, the heart of Central Asia, with its oases, deserts, bleak uplands, and nomadic peoples, which was under Chinese sovereignty, remained almost an untouched mission field.

On the 4th February, 1834, we find another agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society in St. Petersburg, looking toward Central Asia – none other than George Borrow. Having called on the British Ambassador with a view to obtaining permission to send Christian Gospels in the Manchu language into ‘Chinese Tartary’, he writes to his employers in London: ‘There is a most admirable opening on the Russian side of the Chinese Empire. About five thousand miles from St. Petersburg, and only nine hundred miles from Peking, stands the town of Kiakta, which properly belongs to Russia, but the inhabitants are a medley of Tartars, Chinese and Russ. As far as this town, a Russian or a foreigner is permitted to advance, but any further progress is forbidden, and he is liable to be taken as a spy or a deserter . . . Chinese caravans are continually arriving, carrying articles of merchandise. There are a Chinese and a Tartar Mandarin, also a school where Chinese and Tartar are taught along with Russian children.’ Borrow then presents his plan for Central Asia to his London headquarters: ‘Your sagacity will at once perceive,’ he writes, ‘what great advantage this town is capable of being turned to, in the cause of God. There would not be much difficulty in disposing, at a low price, of any quantity of Testaments to the Chinese merchants who move thither from Peking and other places. In a word, were an Agent of the Bible Society to reside in this town for a year or so, it is my humble opinion, if he were active, zealous and

likewise courageous, the blessing resulting from his labours would be incalculable.' In his letter, Borrow gives the situation of the Siberian town of Kiakta (or Kia-chta) as about a hundred miles south of Lake Baikal on the frontier of Mongolia, and adds that, 'Here the caravan trade with China across the Gobi Desert enters Siberia.'

From London, six months later, Borrow gets a tactful reply: 'Concerning your noble offer to wander, Testament in hand, to the town of Kiakta – if not to Peking – with side glances at Tartar hordes . . . should such a scheme be found to be a safe and prudent speculation, there is no person known to us whom we should more cheerfully employ to make the daring experiment than yourself. But we once before had an eye on Kiakta as a door to introduce Chinese Scriptures via Russia, but we were given to understand by our Agent, Dr. Paterson, that such a speculator might probably find not Kiakta but Siberia at the end of his journey! . . . Be not discouraged; write again and again, and convince us, if you can, that you have the practical wisdom of experienced men on your side, as well as the sanguine temperament of your own enterprising disposition.' So the Gobi Desert still waited for the coming of the Christian Gospel.

Years later, there was an interesting sequel to George Borrow's visit to Russia, however. In 1908, the China Inland Mission, opening up work in Chinese Turkistan at Urumchi, had sent out one Mr. George Hunter. Finding there a tribe of some forty thousand people who spoke the Manchu language. Hunter wrote for Scriptures to the China office, in Shanghai, of the Bible Society, whose Secretary, Dr. Bondfield, had already trekked across China and written a book on Mongolia. Hunter obtained copies of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, printed in parallel columns in the Manchu and Chinese tongues. It was a version on which George Borrow had worked during his months in St. Petersburg three generations earlier!*

The explorer, Henry Stanley, once described European knowledge of the heart of Africa as a 'blank', and the same might almost have been said concerning the world's knowledge of the heart of Asia. To the east lay densely peopled China; to the south, the mountain fortress of Tibet; to the north, Russian Siberia, Mongolia and the Altai plateau. Between the two ranges of mountains, the Altai and those of Tibet, and leading to the Gobi Desert, lay vast plateaux and the Kansu Corridor, known to travellers as 'China's pan-handle'. The desert was a thousand miles long and in places seven hundred miles wide. Over its stony floor ran the Old Silk Road, along

* Letters of George Borrow, T. H. Darlow, Hodder and Stoughton, 1911.

which, stretching beyond the desert's thousand miles, Chinese, Mongols, Turkis, Manchus, Tibetans and Russians had wandered for centuries.

It was toward this spiritual no-man's-land, standing between Russia and China, that our Trio, armed only with their integrity and the Christian gospel, decided they must move – going out, like Abraham of old, not knowing whither they went. And their aim? Mildred Cable wrote: 'If no more could be done for these people, certainly no less was owed to them than to place a Gospel in each man's hand – written in his own mother-tongue.'

Did they realise what they were undertaking? One of the people who met them on the early stages of their way writes to me: 'My wife and I were stationed at the C.I.M. Hospital, Kaifeng, when the three ladies arrived there. They began the long journey overland by cattle-cart and litter . . . For weeks the only food available at the inns was a choice of noodles with garlic, or noodles with red peppers. Food was cooked by burning camel-dung, which fuel also heated the brick-beds or *kangs* they slept on occasionally . . . Members of such a party do well to collect any camel-dung found on the way – if they want warm beds at night – or a cooked meal! . . . Occasionally, travellers meet wolves and brigands on the way . . .'

10 – THE OLD SILK ROAD

FROM Shansi Province in the north-west, where the Trio had lived, there were three routes by which they could reach north-west China, and the Province of Kansu, to which they now knew they were called. There was a direct camel-track, running roughly between parallels 36° and 40°, keeping at about three thousand feet above sea-level, through the desert of Inner Mongolia. Rather remarkably, had they travelled that lonely way, they would have passed only a few hundred miles south of Kiakta, on the Russo-Mongolian border, mentioned nearly a hundred years before by George Borrow. A second direction would have been to follow the winding course of the Yellow River towards its upper reaches – at that time of the year subject to floods. The road they finally planned to take joined the Old Silk Road used since the time of Christ, and one of its advantages for the Trio was that for some hundreds of miles they would be within reach of mission stations, though even these, at their pace of travel, were sometimes separated by as much as a week's journey.

The early stages of this route passed through fertile plans of wheat or cotton and orchards of fruit, for Shansi Province had been called the granary of China.

In the next Province of Shensi, the Old Silk Road took up the story, and here it levelled out near to the city of Sian, where Nestorian missionaries had erected their now famous stone tablet in the year A.D. 781. Then, making a 'right incline', the track lumbered north-west toward Lanchow, some three hundred miles away. On again, it entered a valley known as the Kansu Corridor, which extended at varying widths north-west for some six hundred miles. Its strategic importance was such that two thousand years before, a Chinese Emperor, hoping to control its traffic and thus to keep out China's enemies, had built the West Gate of the Great Wall close beside it.

Before the Christian era, Lao-tse, the sage and founder of one of China's great philosophies, had passed that way, turning his back on a people which at that time had rejected his teaching of *Tao*, 'The Way', the universal harmony of life. Chang Chin, an explorer of the Han dynasty, had tramped over that same stony floor into Central Asia, and seven hundred years later, a monk, Hsüan Chuang of the T'ang dynasty, had travelled through it as far as India. There the mighty armies of Genghis Khan and his successors had ridden their Mongolian ponies westward, to join in one vast empire the China Sea to the Black Sea. 'He was not content with a kingdom as large as that of Alexander or Caesar, but wished to reign over all the world,' wrote Sven Hedin, a Swedish explorer of those parts. Marco Polo and the Venetian merchants, Buddhist missionaries, Tibetan lamas, Islamic imams, and Franciscan friars had all gone that way. Here, too, the Cyrillic alphabet of the Slavs had passed into Mongolia to meet with Chinese pictograph, and the clear-cut art of China had met the intricate architecture of the Hindu. It was the melting-pot of Asia . . .

So much for the geography and history of their route.

Our Trio had still to learn many of these stories, but with characteristic confidence they said: 'Our aim will be to visit every city of the Kansu Province situated beyond the Great Wall.' It was the confidence of the uninitiated, and of all the queer, courageous sights this old Road had witnessed few could have been more fantastic than the cavalcade of these three middle-aged European spinsters, with carts, and carters, toiling beasts and bulging baggage, setting off for Central Asia's no-man's-land to talk about the love of God. Before they started they heard that somewhere on that same road

two women missionaries were already prisoners in the hands of bandits . . .

But out they went. The military escort, upon which the Chinese Government had insisted, was more of a strain than a service, for it consisted of six youths, armed with rifles and cartridge belts. By the end of the first day the Trio knew all of them by name, knew their ages, and how many babies each had in his family. Nevertheless, they were to meet early trouble. The idea was that their escort should be replaced, to return to their homes, after three days' travel; but even at the end of the first day the officer to whom they reported changed the personnel, and tips had to be distributed as the soldiers departed. Next day the procedure was repeated, this time after only half-a-day's march; so tips were accordingly reduced . . .

It is sometimes said that people grow like the pets they keep, and certainly some missionaries seem to grow like the people to whom they minister. At any rate, temperaments change with environment, so now we see a solemn Trio, seated in a typically Chinese roadside market, at the centre of an excited crowd which is beginning to take sides in a dispute. The soldiers demand increased tips, and as do policemen in Paris, they explain to the crowd their point of view. Voices become shrill, tempers rise, arms begin to swing around, the crowd surges to and fro. Only a spark is needed for a first-class flare-up. But no! Our three ladies, seated Buddha-like on their bundles, appear unconcerned, aloof and completely Chinese, each with an expressionless face and a heavy air of indifference. To all intents this quarrel has nothing to do with them. Threats from officer and escort alike fail to disturb their magnificent immobility, so local deities are called in to help, and curses used concerning the goings-out and the comings-in of the three foreign devils. Odd remarks – none too polite – are also uttered about the ancestors of the Trio. 'May your carts overturn, your baggage be stolen, and for your stinginess, may you be robbed!' But the Trio prove to be as dumb and as glum as stained-glass saints. At long last everyone cools off. Then, and only then, is it made quite plain to officer and escorts alike that whether they accompany the Trio or stay behind – the decision must be their own – in any case there will be no more payment whatsoever.

As we have seen, since 1911 there had been no stable government in China, and by this time, 1923, Sun Yat Sen was a sick man. Remote towns into which the Trio were going had been taken and retaken by rival armies or by brigands. For years peasants had been

forced to help both sides. Roads were untended; inns were in a wretched state, and sometimes doors and windows, not to speak of furniture, had been wrenched out and stolen.

From time to time along the road the Three Women met a sort of dishevelled Falstaff's army, dirty, emaciated, casting lean and hungry looks at their baggage. On such occasions their escort suddenly became invisible, returning further along the road to explain that they had been watching from a vantage point! Otherwise, roads were deserted and for long hours they would meet no traveller – the utter silence broken only by the regular rhythm of their animals' feet. On and on they went, day after day. Night-time found them physically weary but glad for the roof of even a poor inn. Then the scraping of their cart-wheels and the plod, plod, plod of their animals' feet along the road was replaced by what the Trio came to call 'the soothing sound of crunching of fodder by the tired mules'.

The Trio had one experience which they remembered for many a day. At a spot on the road where the earth seemed like dough, their cart, with them in it, plunged axle-deep into a mud-pit. To make matters worse the back-axle of the cart snapped, and for a whole day they had to await help. Recounting this experience some years later to another explorer, Sir Francis Younghusband, the ladies were told that thirty years previously he himself had spent a full day in that same notorious mud-pit, from which it appeared local inhabitants drew a regular income – helping to rescue travellers in distress!

It was a memorable night when they crossed the border of Kansu and came into the Province they had longed to see. Despite the darkness they could detect an outline of stately trees silhouetted against the skyline, and their hearts beat high, for here, at long last, they had reached the frontier of the Province – vast though it was – in which they felt they were intended to work. Still in some doubt about the exact location of their future activity, they had finally entered Kansu territory. The road narrowed, and now they were travelling along an escarpment. They noticed that people here lived in caves hollowed out from the cliff side, and their own resting place on that first Kansu night reminded them of the inn at Bethlehem. They lay down to sleep on a raised *kang*, on which travellers and carters alike slept. Upon this the Trio spread cotton quilts, while their mules fed alongside. But the place was filthy. The walls were black with the grime of generations, and the floor was littered with the damp stable manure of the munching beasts. To make matters worse there was no window. The door was low, the *kang* unheated,

and the night was cold. As the dim light from an oil-lamp flickered, weird shadows crept around the cave . . . Such was their reception in Kansu Province, but they remembered that their adopted land was torn by civil war.

However serious the political problem, the social problem of China's people was almost worse—illiteracy, drudgery, poverty, hunger, hopelessness—and that night it was once again brought home to them. Outside their cave was another, much smaller, a hollowed-out recess in the cliff, the size of a baker's oven. Rags hung at its opening, and through the rags projected three pairs of feet, the property of men in deep opium-drugged sleep within the recess. The night was bitterly cold, but neither the cold nor the evil-smelling inn troubled these poor creatures any longer. For a few hours they had escaped from the reality of living . . .

A few days later in the next city they saw what they later described as a 'motley crowd of several hundred beggars', sitting on the temple steps. The beggars displayed such a variety of physical ills as to make the Trio wonder 'how such existence could be endured'. Yet if beggars are to sit anywhere it is exactly on the temple steps that they ought to sit, as the blind and halt did in our Lord's day, for religion without compassion is a mockery. 'All too familiar,' they wrote, 'is the sight, on a winter's morning, of a naked corpse, man, woman or child, frozen to death, and there is no one even to remove it, unless it be the tradesman under whose frontage shelter had been sought.'

A hundred miles up the road from Lanchow one came to the last Christian mission station in north-west China, and here the Trio received a letter from a Chinese doctor, one Dr. Kao, begging them to stop off at his post at Kanchow—about a week's journey further on. They had heard him speak at the C.I.M. Shanghai Conference in April 1922 of the needs of the north-west. Four years previously he had gone to live in Kanchow, a city on the fringe of the desert. He had been trained at the C.I.M. Borden Memorial Hospital in Lanchow, and on first visiting the city of Kanchow he had been greatly distressed by the ignorance, disease and superstition he had found there; so as a Christian he had decided to make his home in that outpost.

Two days later, at a small populated centre, Yung Chang, where sand-storms blown from the Inner Mongolia desert often blanketed the fertile farmlands, the Trio were overjoyed to be met by none other than Mrs. Kao, the doctor's wife, and her two small children, who, with some members of a small Kanchow church started by Dr.

Kao, had travelled well over a hundred miles to welcome them, and to accompany them on their way.

But from here onwards the journey became something of a nightmare. Later they described it to friends: 'The road over which we passed was very rough. The carts bumped over boulders, were dragged up and down sand-hills, and squelched through semi-solid mud-lakes . . . Our starting-time was never later than 4 a.m., and darkness frequently overtook us on a desolate expanse far from any habitation . . . On one occasion we sat for hours, leaning back against the Great Wall of China, our cart up to the axle in a mud-pit.' Travelers with experience of the world's desolate places know the sinking feeling which hits one in the pit of the stomach when transport collapses and one is left to await unknown and uncertain help from some stray passer-by . . .

Further on, the stretch of land between Richthofen Mountain in the south and the sand-hills of Mongolia in the north narrowed as they approached Kanchow. At one moment they were thrilled by the deep blue of the Mongolian sky stretching away on the northern horizon, at another they were chilled to the bone by a blinding cloud of sleet coming up from the southern Tibetan Alps. On the last stage, in their eagerness to get to Kanchow, they rose at 3 a.m. On they toiled, but twelve hours later their cart was again in difficulty — once more stuck in deep mud. Just at that moment a horse and rider appeared in the distance galloping towards them. It was Dr. Kao himself. Knowing the difficulty of this stretch of terrain he had ridden out to meet them. After a cheery greeting, for he was a buoyant person, he looked searchingly at the hired Chinese carter who had been directing their route and guiding their animals. Immediately Dr. Kao recognised him. He was a rascal who had done three or four terms in prison for careless driving and for destroying the property of previous travellers whom he had been accompanying. Dr. Kao did not mix his metaphors, and soon took charge of operations . . . Long after sunset, with extra horses sent for by Dr. Kao, the Trio arrived. They had been travelling for eighteen hours in the teeth of a bitter north-wester, with no food but cold dough-cakes, fried in linseed oil. In their records they rarely gave way to their own feelings, but on this occasion they wrote: 'We were broken with fatigue.'

They had left Hwochow in June 1923 and it was now March 1924. They had travelled fifteen hundred miles since starting out.

Kanchow was about three hundred miles beyond Lanchow, situated amongst hills on the banks of the Kan Kiang, a tributary of the

Yangtse. It was an important place, which in more recent years, because of its strategic value, has become a rail junction. Well-watered, it stood among a group of lakes fed by mountain streams and underground springs drawing their water from the snows of Tibet. It was a religious town, too, in which every home seemed to have its family shrine and ancestral tablet where incense was regularly burned. At nightfall bells tinkled as each household remembered its departed members, and centuries before Marco Polo had described it as a place of 'more gods than men'. There was said to be a god for every day in the year, not to speak of the kitchen deities, the needle-work god, the stable god, the money god and – in the fields – gods of sky and earth.

Beyond Kanchow lay the city of Suchow. It was the last large city one saw within the Wall itself before going out into the Gobi. There, Mongolian camel-drivers lodged, Mohammedan travellers congregated in their serai, teams were collected, carts repaired, animals tended and footsore passengers rested. It was also the nearest city to the important Southward Pass through the Tibetan Alps on the route to India. In both these places – Suchow and Kanchow – were markets; fairs and festivals were held, crowded with people from the surrounding villages in the large oasis area. Across fifty miles or so of stones and sand lay other fertile oasis-towns, where visitors were welcome, crowds might congregate to listen, to buy literature. And here lay the strategic region to which our Trio were being slowly led.

From the populated *loess* plains of Shansi Province where cattle peacefully grazed and salt and coal were mined, they had moved toward the desert, where stealthy sands of a creeping wilderness silt up, not only ancient tracks, but the minds of men and their civilisations. Just off the beaten road they were to see houses standing empty, like fortresses of bygone days; hollow-eyed, shady temples deserted; villages silent, like pale corpses haunted by moonlight. Yet amid the sand and silt, the bitter brackish lakes, were oases; there was life. Children were raised and homes survived, for below the arid sterility of the desert, running underground from the far-away hills, there were rivers of water. Within three hundred miles of the West Gate of the Great Wall – the 'Great Mouth' – built in the Desert itself, were oasis-towns of considerable size, places like Yümen, Ansi, Tunhwang, throbbing with life, each with its own history and its own pride. Every community had its market, its fair and its own special interest. From Tunhwang, across five days of desert, lay the temples of the Thousand Buddhas, and further on,

the Lake of the Crescent Moon. At Ansi, there was an old garrison outpost, which for centuries had protected Chinese from Tibetans and Urguis. In some of these ancient places you could discover ornate frescoes on the walls of abandoned temples, and even in the sands and rocks traces that once the ocean itself had been there.

Even before arriving at Kanchow, our Trio had found the answer they were seeking. They had been told that they had now passed the last established mission station and that apart from Dr. Kao's little community there was no Christian outpost nearer than Urumchi—at the far side of the Gobi Desert and two months' travel further on. When they heard that, they wrote: 'Suddenly the fog lifted . . .' They saw a Pattern and they knew that they had found their job.

In his book entitled *China Changed my Mind*,* David Morris wrote about the China Inland Mission: 'With China torn from side to side by civil war, many of the women remain spinsters, indomitably travelling about the interior of China, spreading the Gospel, when their contemporaries at home are drawing their old age pensions. They carry with them the never failing memories of some puritanical Victorian childhood, and they drink a cup of tea in a cheerfully filthy Chinese inn as though they were daintily entertaining the vicar in Kensington.'

11 — 'SOMETHING HAPPENED'

THE Trio once wrote a book entitled *Something Happened*. When they arrived at Kanchow not only did they find a Chinese Church there; they were astonished to discover that for weeks the little group of Christians had been praying that experienced Christian workers might come to help them. Just three weeks before the arrival of the Trio, two or three Christians from the Kanchow congregation, with Dr. Kao, had gone to stay at a quiet lamasery near the Tibetan hills, so that they might be undisturbed and seek God's guidance. Now they had returned to Kanchow and there, before their eyes, something *had* happened; three missionary women had arrived! At a small meeting shortly afterwards the Trio heard reports which surprised them: groups of Kanchow Christians had already started to visit the surrounding countryside, to hold meetings, going as far as Suchow and to the fringe of the Gobi Desert itself. 'We have a

* Houghton Mifflin, Boston, U.S.A.

proposal to make,' Dr. Kao said to the Trio. 'If you will make yourselves responsible for their training, we will guarantee to you a band of men and women to accompany you in your pioneering journeys. Teach them the Scriptures.'

What sort of man was he, this Chinese Church leader, Dr. Kao, who, two years previously, at the C.I.M. Conference in Shanghai, had been pleading for workers to go to north-west China? He was born in the Province of Honan, where people were known for their toughness. His parents had not been Christian, and he himself had first heard of Christianity at a village fair when he was sixteen. Later he was offered a small job at a mission hospital, and such was his ability that he was encouraged to take medical training and qualify as a doctor. This he did, and with his aptitude, ready wit, and adaptability, he was soon found comfortable medical jobs with the Government, and accepted the security and affluence which such positions gave. He was Christian but followed what the Trio once called a 'self-arranged career'. Then he set out to work sacrificially somewhere in the untouched north-west, where he had come to the city of Kanchow. Finally, and having reached Kansu at the age of thirty-six, he had diagnosed spiritual hunger as well as physical need amongst its inhabitants. At first he had met opposition among the superstitious folk there, and many a landlord had moved him on. But people had been attracted to him. Moreover, he was a doctor, so finally, in a Buddhist temple, he found accommodation. He was a witty conversationalist, and with his dispensary work and dentistry he gradually became the talk of the town. If it was suggested that he could even work miracles, the reason was not far to seek. A woman with a dislocated jaw had arrived on the arm of her son. She was ill and emaciated, and as she could not eat, was gradually dying of starvation. Kao listened to the story, felt the jaw, and suddenly something clicked into place: behold, the woman was healed! Such news travels far and fast. Kao, growing bold, began to preach on the temple steps. On another day a caravan of Mongolians, headed by a prince with his princess, clad in satin and adorned with jade and gold, came to Dr. Kao's house, accompanied by a retinue of twenty horsemen trotting beside them. This created quite a stir in the city. With their sick child, they had travelled for nine days from the far-away Altai mountains. The child was carefully nursed and after many weeks was ultimately cured, the prince in gratitude presenting Dr. Kao with a camel. But the prince had taken a fancy to Kao's fountain-pen, and looking the gift-camel in the mouth Kao drily remarked that he would have preferred to keep

his fountain-pen. The prince went on his way, to carry with him to his Kalmuk people news that a Christian doctor had healed his little daughter.

Success also makes enemies. The benevolent priests who had permitted Dr. Kao to lodge in the precincts of the temple could not endure the antics of the clever doctor who deemed it part of his duty to undermine their own beliefs. Not only, they said, must he leave the rooms he was occupying; he must be ejected from the town. By now, however, Kao had other friends, and a town Elder, who had been one of his early patients, gently told the priests that Kao must be permitted to stay. 'I gave large sums to repair your temple,' he said. 'If Kao is turned out I will want all that money back from you.' So it had come about that in the course of the next few years many people had helped to build a dispensary for the doctor; later, a school-house (plus playground) with a library for books.

By the time the Trio arrived at Kanchow a small company of Christians had begun to live in the doctor's compound on a communal basis. Each had his allotted task. One acted as the doctor's medical assistant, another kept the cash and saw to the medical fees. The church members together had bought farm-land and collectively owned a flock of sheep. Funds were held on a communal basis and controlled by a small finance committee. The community lacked experience and had its problems, but the spirit of the place was well illustrated by a youth who had come from Dr. Kao's native province, Honan. He came to seek a brother of whom the family had lost trace for years, and he arrived in Kanchow penniless. Desperate, he came to the site where Dr. Kao's building was being erected and was given work. Over the next few months he turned out to be loyal and industrious and was asked to help Kao in the daily dispensary work, starting each morning by sweeping out the courtyard prior to the arrival of the patients. At dawn one morning, through the open window of Dr. Kao's room, he heard his employer praying aloud for him by name, and was astonished at such concern for him. He realised for the first time that this hospital represented a new kind of community, where people were held together by an invisible bond of obedience to God — and that he *belonged*. The practice of praying aloud even in solitude was a recognised custom in the Chinese Church. Madame Chiang Kai Shek, sister-in-law of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, once told the story of her mother, a keen Christian, who would pray aloud in her room for each of her children in turn. Overhearing her one day, Madame Chiang remarked that she had never forgotten those prayers. And perhaps in this connection it is not surprising

that Dr. Sun himself, when he was dying in the Union Medical College Hospital in Peking, had whispered to his brother-in-law: 'I want it to be known that I die a Christian.'

And now, in this out-of-the-way place and to this little Church at Kanchow, had come our Trio. They were invited to prepare a hand-picked band of young Chinese men and women, who later would accompany them into the heart of the desert country. Something had certainly happened, and if a call from God is confirmed by 'a willing heart and an open door', surely here was confirmation of their call to Kansu Province. It was part of the Pattern.

Later the Trio wrote of Kanchow: 'For six radiant months, men and women gave themselves unreservedly to the delights of Bible study, and from that half-year of work there emerged a company who professed and called themselves Christians and who on the profession of that Faith received Baptism.'

So, on the invitation of Dr. Kao, the Trio in some measure repeated the plan for Bible School preparation which they had initiated in Hwochow. They found people in Kansu simpler than they had been in Shansi, but the study, the singing and the services afforded them the same joy – and not to their pupils only. Patients at the dispensary would arrive early so as not to miss the happy songs of the Christian compound, where evil spirits seemed to be non-existent. Bible study went on more or less all the morning, and at 3 p.m. Dr. Kao himself gave simple and practical talks on hygiene and first aid. Children's services, with more songs, were held in the evening as a sort of recreation, and it was not long before the gossip of the city became preoccupied with news concerning 'These Three Women'. Then bands of young Christians wanted to get out into the countryside to declare publicly what they had come to know as the new Christian freedom from fear of life. So a large tent was made, capable of holding three hundred people, and out went a youthful company, nearly twenty strong – sixty miles into a nearby oasis-town.

It was an interesting picture: a large white tent, all new and gleaming, with flags flying atop and decorations of coloured Scripture cartoons and posters around inside and out; the site being that usually occupied by the town fair. The Trio produced their small portable organ, and Christian literature, including the Gospels in many tongues, was set out on tables. During four days the tent was crowded to capacity with Turkis, Tibetans, Mongols, Chinese – a scene which would have rejoiced the heart of old George Borrow. Dr. Kao, in an easy, colloquial way, was a brilliant speaker, and

with simple, apt illustrations of Christian truth and its application to local life, he rarely failed to make an impact on the listening crowds.

In one of their books the Trio give us a glimpse of one particular locality – Shantan – a small oasis-community which they visited. In the town centre, decked out in gay costume, sat the idol of the locality, in whose honour a festival was taking place. Around him, to supply his domestic needs, were: a bed, wash-basin, mirror and clothing. Surrounding him, too, were gathered the lesser deities of the locality: sober, meditative, grinning, threatening, sexy – all familiar types.

‘The real horror of idols is not merely that they give us nothing, but that they take away from us even that which we have,’ wrote Joy Davidman in her book *Smoke on the Mountain*.* ‘An idolater is always a spritual paralytic . . . If we are to be saved, it will not be by wood, however well carved and polished, nor by machines, however efficient, nor by social planning, however ingenious . . . It must be by the one power which is built into a man at the beginning and that he does not have to make with his hand – the power of the Holy Spirit which is God.’ And there in Shantan, squatting on the ground in front of that little pantheon, was a cluster of kind, ordinary, earthy folk of the oasis. They were quietly listening to one of their number who was reading from a booklet purchased at the Christian bookstall in the tent. It was the Gospel of St. Luke, and the story to which they were listening was that of the Prodigal Son – the boy in a far country who came home, and to his astonishment found Love awaiting him . . .

To the Trio, such scenes were of the essence of their mission: the challenge of showing to ordinary human beings obsessed by the fear of life a new and significant vision of Love as the key to all our human being and to our being human. ‘The awakening,’ Francesca wrote, ‘can be compared to the rapture of a deaf man who suddenly *hears*. Until that moment he has been sitting in a room where others were listening spellbound to lovely music, while he remained unconscious of the source of their enjoyment – not unhappy but only partially alive.’

12 – THE CITY OF KANCHOW

THE temples of Kanchow were built on the higher land at the city centre, and in this same area, Dr. Kao had finally obtained land for

* Hodder & Stoughton.

a mission compound, his dispensary and school. Nearby, a hundred and twenty feet long and forty high, reclined an enormous image of the 'Sleeping Buddha'.

Kanchow was an historic place, and while they were in this city the Trio would often walk in the cool of the evening amongst the flowering bushes in the beautiful garden of the 'Temple of the Spacious Hills'. On its walls were frescoes dating back to the Nestorian period. Marco Polo himself had once been Governor of Kanchow. Such an oasis-settlement can cover many miles of fertile country, consisting of a central town or city with outlying villages and hamlets, all dependent on local water-supply, springs, lakes and underground rivers. There was much to see, and the Trio became familiar figures in streets and even in the surrounding countryside, for they began to follow the plan of village visitation they had learned in Shansi Province. The difference hereabouts was that the desert was never very far away, though Kanchow was really a very large oasis-district. Many of the hamlets around were dependent upon irrigation canals running to them from the Black River, and squabbles about water-rights were frequent. Poverty, poorness of soil, and malnutrition in some of those isolated fringe settlements resulted in a lethargy and listlessness which in turn led not a few into the opium habit. Homes were often bare, and in some places wheat bread would not be available for years. Children ran naked in the streets.

Yet even here, the impact of down-to-earth Christian action could make a difference. At one village, Dr. Kao arrived with members of the Kanchow Christian Youth Club. He had come to preach, but he noted that the irrigation channels were choked with rubbish. He looked at the people, thought them listless and emaciated, and soon saw the symptoms of the opium-habit. He invited the leaders of the village to meet him, and characteristically his first word to them was to wake up, work hard, and to change their ways! But there was a problem of human relationships. He discovered that there had been a quarrel between the leaders of two local communities about water-rights, and as punishment the local Magistrate had cut off the canal-water. Kao declared to the leaders that God would hold them responsible for their slackness and that they must pray that the Magistrate would change his mind and restore their water-supply.

But to pray was not enough, he said, they must prepare for God to help them. He called for spades, and with his youth club, he himself started to clean the channels, 'ready,' he said, 'for the answer to our prayers.' Two days later the Magistrate happened to be taken

ill, and hearing of Dr. Kao's presence in the district he called for his help. Then the Magistrate asked the doctor what 'all this cleaning of the channels' was about . . . A few days later – and for the first time in three years – water began to flow!

One of the Trio's exciting trips out from Kanchow City was a journey they made to the south, into the foothills of Tibetan country. They were a party of twelve, carrying tent, books, organ, rice and flour. Snows were melting and rivers divided into shallow channels. Even so the channels were sometimes half a mile across, and to ford the torrents took more than an hour. As they neared the farther side, one of the hired mules pulling their cart stumbled in the water. It was an anxious moment. Startled by its own misplaced footing, but encouraged by shouts from the muleteer on the river bank, and with the Trio's mule Molly, in the shafts, the patient animal pulled them through.

A day or so later, after passing through a sandy waste, and following through a deep gorge, the track began to ascend toward the foothills. Now they were meeting mountain torrents, but by evening, when they halted, they found themselves in Tibet. Tents were being erected for the night, when suddenly, amongst the hills, a tornado broke. Their tents were blown over, their packages scattered to the wind, and the Trio had to spend the night in a farmer's barn. On again, all next day they climbed a ravine between the peaks, with blue iris, clematis, orchids, gentians, edelweiss and golden lichen in full bloom. It recalled for them all, and particularly for Eva and Francesca, memories of upland valleys in their beloved Switzerland.

Then suddenly looking up, there in the distance just a few miles ahead, stood the walls of an ancient lamasery, topping the hill and seeming to be part of the craggy landscape. On the long pull up from the valley they had noticed increasing numbers of prayer-wheels inscribed with petitions of the peasant people. Prayer-flags were placed on the boughs of trees, by the bubbling stream, on prominent rocks, near to deep chasms – indeed, wherever there was movement or danger or abnormality these magical symbols were visible. This was the kind of pathetic 'seeking' which always aroused compassion in the Trio, and whether it is described as 'animism', 'naturism', or 'dynamism', it was a search for meaning in life. But it was also *magic*: the parasite which clings to almost every form of religion. It is religion short-circuited, yet somewhere preceding the mumbo-jumbo there was thought, reason, philosophy – a quest for God. Unlike Christianity, magic never embraces life, with its tragedy

and its cross. It is an insurance policy against it, an endeavour either to escape from it or to control it. Real religion is surely a personal fellowship with the Unseen—not a creed, formula, gadget or gimmick, but a way of life.

As the Trio approached, out from the lamasery came red-robed lamas, smiling, hospitable, benevolent, to welcome their guests—for they were expected. Around the building crowds of people were gathered, for the Trio had chosen a festival-time for their visit. A group of Tibetan women came forward, their curiosity evident as they touched the hands of the three European women and fingered their hair, for here, in the Tibetan uplands, Chinese etiquette no longer held. Soon spontaneous, outgoing friendship, for which the Trio were well known in other places, began to build up . . . The Abbot of the monastery came to greet the ladies with great respect, and was particularly intrigued by a luminous wrist-watch worn by one of them. Did it actually tell the time in the dark? How was that possible? Could he borrow it for the night, to see for himself?

Lamaism is a particular form of Buddhism, introduced into Tibet and Mongolia in the seventh century A.D. Its 'Pope' is the Dalai Lama, who, before the Chinese invasion in 1950, lived in his palace at Lhasa. He is considered to be an incarnation of the founder of the faith. In those days one in every five of the Tibetan male population was a monk, and a monastery might house several thousand monks. The Government of Tibet itself was theocratic, the Dalai Lama being the political as well as the spiritual head of his people. Hundreds of abbots and religious dignitaries, too, were considered to be incarnations of deities and saints, and Tibet and Mongolia were often said to be priest-ridden and non-progressive. Yet there were some fine tenets in the lamas' teachings: the sacredness of life, the importance of literacy, the place of meditation, the necessity for atonement, purification by suffering, though faith was often a formula with the primary aim of gaining merit, or else a way of self-preservation.

Though the masses of the Tibetan people were illiterate the sacred and ancient Sanskrit books of Lamaism contained stories of a Creator, the fall of man, a plan of salvation . . . with many of the moral tenets of the Ten Commandments of Moses. But to the common people these were closed books. 'Your religion cannot be of much use,' said a lama to a Moravian missionary in west Tibet, '*anybody* can understand it'. For centuries Tibetan society has been held together by Lamaism, with the priests as guides, philosophers and friends to humble folk—and often the money-lenders of the community as well.

Our Trio found it all new and interesting and a little sad, for these were a lovely people. They met a horsewoman aged seventy who could vault on to an excited animal and ride it bareback. The 'Sixteenth day of the Sixth Moon' was apparently a special day, and they were startled at midnight by the temple heralds blowing what the Trio recorded as a 'hellish blast' on a horn ten feet long. They were sad to see how earnest-looking pilgrims would collect the dust from the path over which the feet of a Living Buddha had passed, in order to gain good luck. As the Festival progressed, and as part of it, the priests mingled with the people dressed, at times, in strange costumes, wearing black masks with yawning mouths and protruding eyes, 'hopping, skipping and jumping about' – wrote the Trio. And when the dance was barely over their acolytes, without the slightest concealment, were busy amongst the girls, choosing here and there.

Perhaps our Three Women took it all rather too seriously, for such was the charm and simplicity of the ordinary folk that when they left the precincts of the lamasery, they flocked with the same ardour into the tent of the Trio, attracted by the organ, the hymn-singing, and the words of the Chinese preacher. With Eastern hospitality some of them, poor as they were, gave presents to their guests: butter, cream and cheese. It turned out that the butter was rancid and full of yak-hair, the cream was sour, and the cheese so 'powerful' that it had to be kept in the open air outside the tent. Nevertheless, the formulae of hospitality and the rules of courtesy had been kept – with a disarming smile . . . But shyly, lingering behind, when the crowd had left the tent, a Living Buddha stood silent and alone. He wanted to talk. 'That prodigal son you spoke of just now – *forgiven* by his father! What about the sin of previous lives which burden us all on this Wheel of Life? What about *that*?' It was all new and strange – and no wonder. To forgive is always a breakthrough – a release and a new beginning.

So behind the façade, the fun and the formulae, there was spiritual hunger, and when only a few years ago the British and Foreign Bible Society printed the Bible in the language of Tibet, and some people at home asked: 'To what purpose? Is not Tibet a closed land?', the facts revealed that even a second edition was soon called for, and the names became known of a score of lamaseries in various parts of Tibet where the Christian Scripture had been placed on the shelves of their libraries.

And the last we hear of that particular Living Buddha, who waited behind after the service, was that he, too, went away with the words of Jesus of Nazareth hidden in the folds of his red cloak.

13—ON THE FRINGE OF THE DESERT

THE time had come for the Trio to move on from Kanchow to pioneering work beyond, and when they actually left, the members of the little Kanchow church accompanied them for several miles along the way. But it was not to be 'goodbye', only 'au revoir'.

Their practice had always been to travel slowly, staying unhurriedly along the way. Asia had taught them many things, and they felt that their main job was not just to 'get there at top speed'. Wherever there were men or women willing to talk, the Trio were ready and relaxed—prepared to listen and to share. In hamlets, lonely farmhouses, wayside inns or at village fairs and festivals, it was always people rather than places that mattered. On many a mission-field the coming of the motor-car has been of great value in covering wide ecclesiastical areas: dioceses, districts, circuits and the like, but the intimacy of the pastor with his people in the days when he walked, and above all, when he slept in their villages, has suffered proportionately.

Fuji was a tiny walled town on their way to the next Gobi-fringe city of Suchow, and the Trio were invited to stay at the home of the local Magistrate. For seventeen days they stayed, and in return taught in the local school the rapid method of phonetic reading of Chinese script. They were surprised to hear that students from little Fuji sometimes earned places at the college in distant Lanchow—a journey of some three weeks. Though the Trio were the guests of the Mandarin they continued to hold their evangelistic services, and he made no objection. It was a package deal.

And what a satisfying life it was!—to rise each morning feeling that you had no programme, no bus or train to catch, no timetable to keep, only the sovereign responsibility to seek out people—the world's chief wealth. But what a responsibility, too, when contact had been made, to choose the right approach; the word of healing and not of hindering the penetration of Christian perspectives on the sort of world we live in and (without offending) the sort of needy people we really are.

Over there, standing amid well irrigated fields and surrounded by a high wall something like an island fortress, the Trio saw the isolated home of a leading local land-owner. It was remote, superior, self contained. They had heard that he was a sort of squire in the neighbourhood. Within his walled acre lay courtyards, wives,

children, slaves, and hired labourers. If you ventured to visit him, you found the guard at the gate to be fairly effective, and you also heard the bark of Tibetan mastiffs inside the wall. Nevertheless, the Trio went.

Up another road, sandy and rutted, some few miles off the beaten track, they discovered an old temple of which they had been told. From its dark and sand-silted doorways projected arms, legs, and the grotesque faces of clay gods, which the blown sand was slowly but peacefully burying. This was a well known brigand area, and sure enough, in one corner the Trio spotted a couple of doubtful-looking figures, fast asleep in the temple precincts, lying on their bags of loot. Those village temples seemed to be the resort of what the Prayer Book calls 'all sorts and conditions of men'—beggars, travellers, even thieves. They were places where people felt they had a right to go, whatever their condition. Did they feel that the temple somehow belonged to them, to the community? If so, it was a sound instinct.

Yonder, on that side of the main road, the Trio saw a group of travellers' tents. A glowing sun was setting, lighting up a horizon of deep desert red, and silhouetting against the hazy skyline groups of camels grazing on the thorny shrubs of that barren place. The headman was coming across the foreground to greet them. He turned out to be a graduate of Lanchow College, and together they talked for a long time about God and the hazards of human existence . . . As that Eastern cavalcade moved off the headman and each of his little company carried with them copies of the story of Him (to quote Lord Morley) 'at Whose pure flame the spiritual life of the West has been kindled during all these centuries.'

Autumn frosts were now approaching and nights getting colder, so the Trio felt that perhaps they ought to move a little more quickly toward Suchow—their immediate destination. The cook, who had lived with them for ten years and who had accompanied them from Shansi, insisted that they make a detour to avoid, as he said, 'other thieves' of whose presence in the neighbourhood he had heard in the local market. So, by a somewhat longer route, the Trio continued, resting wherever shelter offered. Finally, towards the end of many days, they came to a small township on a hillside. It was evident that they were approaching a large oasis region; the grass was green and fresh, the land well watered, and the air cool and crisp. Tired they sat down by the roadside and there, below them, nestling on a large plain, lay a clump of trees. It was a thrilling sight, for behind those

trees lay the city they had dreamt of for many months as the spring-board of their pioneering work in the desert regions beyond. It was Suchow, known sometimes as Chiuchuan – ‘The City of Prodigals’ – the last large city within the Great Wall. Beyond it, only twenty miles away, lay the ‘Great Mouth’ at Kiayükwan, and after that, for a thousand miles, the real Gobi. At long last they had arrived.

Many a pioneer missionary has known the suppressed excitement, on entering a town or village that he would be the first person in history to tell the local people the sublime story of Jesus of Nazareth – to endeavour, with stammering tongue and in the limited language of man’s earthy experience, to let Eternal Truth break into present Fact . . . Is this what the teacher, the artist, the poet, the musician, the scientist, the engineer, the craftsman feels when he burns – to *reveal*, to *witness* to what he has seen?

This, certainly, is what our Trio felt as on that evening they caught their first glimpse of Suchow, in Kansu Province – the fringe of the Gobi Desert. They wrote: ‘Here we sat on a bank, and looked down on what was to us a very beautiful and very thrilling sight . . . A winding river . . . between the trees, and hidden amongst the groves, the city of Suchow, upon which our thoughts had centred for so many months.’

So many months – ever since, in fact, a fellow missionary had said to them, when they were praying for guidance about their future work: ‘Here is the city which awaits your coming’ – and with his long, thin finger on a map he had pointed to *Suchow* – the City of Prodigals.

SUCHOW

14 – GOSSIPING THE GOSPEL

MILDRED Cable had a favourite description of the kind of work they intended to do in the Gobi. 'Gossiping the Gospel', she called it. But in her understanding the words had deeper meaning than mere idle prattle. She went back to the Anglo-Saxon derivation when gospel meant 'good-spell' and a gossip was a sponsor for someone being baptised into the Christian faith – a sort of godparent. For the Trio, the Gobi was to be their parish, and they had been called to minister to all the sorts and conditions of people living there. They felt in some way *responsible* to gossip the Gospel. Eva French was a woman of few words, but at Shanghai Missionary Conference, two years before, she had been emphatic. 'Many of us commenced our evangelistic work in China,' she had told them, 'by going from village to village, visiting the women and living with them. No days or hours are more precious to us than those, as we saw God's grace and love take possession of their hearts . . . Now we train our Chinese sisters and we trust them, and they, too, are known in the villages. We put the whole work into God's hands and send them forth. They go out two and two into the homes. In unevangelised villages we rent a room, and two Bible-women live there two or three weeks . . . All our people should be trained to know that it is *their* business to pass on the Good News . . .'

The Trio were in a great succession. Centuries before, from Burma to Bangkok and from Tibet to Tokyo, 'gossiping' religion had been the business of Buddhists by which they conquered large parts of Asia, giving a new framework to society. In our own day it is the method by which Islam is assimilating Africa – just talking and travelling. In modern jargon it is 'communication'. It is missionary, and in a free world it is both legitimate and essential if men are to remain men. Life demands debate. It is involvement and response. Merely to be neutral is to die, for a civilisation like a society lives as much by faith in its ideals as by its economics . . . 'From the very start,' wrote T. R. Glover, 'every Christian had to know and to understand. He had to be able to give the reason for his faith. He was committed to a great propaganda, by reading about Jesus . . .

He knew where he stood. This has been the essence of the Christian religion.'

Long before modern times, Asia had been an area of peculiar interest for Christianity. In the seventh century, Nestorian Christians, exiled from the Near East, went there and for eight months the Trio themselves had lived in a city which had once been the See of a Christian Metropolitan in those early days. But the Church had died. It was an illiterate Church, and contact with the Christian Scriptures was limited for the documents themselves could hardly have been the finished product and 'they were kept . . . probably amongst a mass of Buddhist literature, sealed up in a cave in Tunhwang for thirteen hundred years.'*

Several centuries later came another opportunity for the Church. After travelling that same Silk Road, Marco Polo wrote about the Kublai Khan of the Mongolian Gobi: 'He sent to the Pope saying that he must send as many as a hundred wise men of the Christian religion . . . who should know well how to argue and to show plainly to the idolaters . . . that the Christian religion is better than theirs . . .' 'How do you wish me to make myself a Christian?' asked Kublai Khan. So in the thirteenth century it was Central Asia which was knocking at the door of the Christian Church at a moment when epoch-making decisions were being taken. But by the turn of that century the opportunity was ebbing; Islam was conquering in Western Asia and Buddhism in the East. Marco Polo now wrote: 'If men should have been sent by the Pope suited to preach our faith to him, the Great Khan would have made a Christian, because it is known for certain that he had a great desire to be so.'

Concerning that strategic moment in history, Prof. John Foster has written: 'Everything points to the fact that the Mongols, simple animists while in their nomad state, as they settled down to rule their vast empire, were wavering in the choice of a religion . . . It might have been the greatest mass-movement the world has ever seen. The history of all Asia would have been altered.'† The Mongols of Central Asia might have passed on Christianity to some, at least, of their Chinese subjects; they might, too, have passed it on to India two hundred years later, when Baber, the first Great Mogul, led them over the mountains to found a kingdom in Hindustan, which endured for centuries.

Marco Polo, a youth of only seventeen and a half, had seen it all.

* J. Foster, *The World Church*, S.C.M. Press.

† *Ibid.*

He had gone to China from his native Venice; later, he had been given positions of great influence in emerging China, and as we have seen, become the Governor of Kanchow. He was keen for the Church to grasp her opportunity. In response to the message of the Khan, two Dominican friars were sent out, but they only got as far as Armenia. The record runs: 'And when the two Brother-Preachers saw this, they had great fear to go further. Then they said they would not go at all.'* Dr. Foster comments: 'So passed the greatest missionary opportunity in the history of the Church!'

Four centuries ago it was the Church which was knocking at the doors of China. Valignani, a Jesuit in Portuguese Macao, looked to the Chinese mainland with the cry: 'Rock, Rock, when wilt thou open?' And the door of China did open for Matteo Ricci, an able young Italian Jesuit, who had studied mathematics, cosmology and astronomy, by the use of which he gained the respect and friendship of China's ruling classes. He took up residence near to Canton, and made himself familiar with Chinese classics, wearing Confucian costume, adopting for Christianity the name for God which he found in the ancient classics. He permitted his converts to become Christian without being disloyal to basic Confucian institutions. His methods met with amazing success, and finally, he laid siege to the imperial court in Peking itself. Before his death in 1610, Ricci saw many become Christian. 'Of these,' says Latourette,† 'the most distinguished was Paul Hsü, on whose land at Zikawei near Shanghai stood the headquarters of the Jesuit Mission.' And such is the tenacity of family life and of ancient belief and custom in China that until today the old plot donated by Paul Hsü three hundred years ago is still the headquarters of the Jesuits in China. Vincent Cronin‡ wrote: 'Ricci had seen that Christianity could never succeed in China as an exotic; it must adapt itself to Oriental ways of thought, graft itself to all that was best in a civilisation older than those within which Christianity had first found expression . . .' But Ricci died, and neither the Pope nor his successors followed Ricci's plan. Cronin adds: 'The dilemma then faced was the same which Ricci's life had so triumphantly solved: how love the totally other without losing identity? . . . They had chosen to be rigorously inflexible. Their guiding principle had been that integrity must precede charity . . . Ricci's policy of tolerance and adaptation was revoked . . .'

* Moule, *Christians in China*, quoted in *World Church*, Foster, S.C.M.

† *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Eyre & Spottiswoode.

‡ *The Wise Man from the West*, Collins.

Gossiping the Gospel: loving without losing identity – those were the tasks of our Trio.

In going to Suchow in 1924 they were well aware of the lost opportunities of Christianity in China and they were resolved on two essentials. First, that any Church which grew out of their activity should be a *Chinese* Church; second, that the Scriptures in the mother-tongue of the people should be widely available to the Church and throughout the oasis-towns. They were conscious, of course, that this part of Central Asia did not present either the opportunities or the difficulties of China's more cultured communities. It was mixed racially, and it was isolated, but it was virgin soil. 'I take the attitude of never doing a piece of work that I can possibly get someone else to do, and yet I know it is hard letting other people do that work,' Eva had declared. She was determined that the churches must be self-governing and self-propagating.

'My fellow-workers and I felt the responsibility of carrying the knowledge of Christ over an extremely wide area committed to us,' wrote Mildred. 'The only way in which we are able to touch our job is by taking long missionary journeys which carry us into the streams of trade-route life. By this method, Christian Scriptures penetrate far beyond the places to which we ourselves go.'

Their arrival in Suchow was the movement of a travelling church, for they were to be thirty in number, all drawn from Kanchow, and Dr. Kao had gone on ahead of them to prepare the way.

Before me as I write is a well-bound exercise book, with stiff covers, bought at Strakers Ltd. in London. It is headed : *Report of Commencement of Work in Suchow, Kansu Province, 1924*, and is written in Eva's clear sprawling hand.

October 11. Dr. Kao, Deacon Gwo, and Dong Shi, the tailor, arrived in Suchow and put up at an inn in the East Suburb.

13. E. F. French, A. M. Cable and F. L. French, accompanied by Yang Sin Shan, arrived early in the day and stayed at an inn owned by a Mr. Wu. We went with Dr. Kao to see a house in the city: very dark, very damp and sunless – unfit for our party of thirty or more people who were to follow.

14. Dr. Kao moved into a court in the city – a wine cellar. We moved into their inn, which was much better than ours.

15. Paid our first visits in the city with Elder Liu. Visited the tinker Djao and the jade-worker Wang.

16. Received visits from teachers at Normal School and Girls' School.

- Saw a good court but scarcely hoped to get it.
17. Got a second small court at the inn and settled down, possibly for the winter.
 18. Called on Wu Jong, Minister of Defence (or Governor), to whom we had a letter of introduction.
 19. First Sunday Service held in Suchow. Many scholars and their teachers attended, as well as other people, amongst them a brother of Pastor Hsi (who had begun Christian work in Hwochow). Sang many hymns, and Dr. Kao spoke of sin and forgiveness.
 20. The Governor called on us in our inn and spent one hour.
 21. Various visits made.
 22. Received visits from some women.
 23. We not only obtained the court visited on October 16th, but a flower-garden close by for us and the women of our party to live in. We have it for one year.
 25. Moved in. The landlord and family are very superstitious and refused to let us do anything that entails plastering until 8th November – so we can't put up stoves or *kangs*. When we mixed a little earth and water to line the inside of our foreign stove, our landlady came in weeping, lest we should bring trouble on them! (There is a story afloat about some evil spirit which caused our landlord's mouth to go crooked when he sat in a sedan-chair and said: 'Now I am like a Mandarin!' The said sedan-chair is still deposited in one of our rooms). Our rooms have been left uninhabited but are very clean.
 26. Dr. Kao preached on 'I am the Bread of Life.'
 27. We entertained a family of Russians to tea, on their way across China to Tientsin.
 29. Visited suburban villages.
 30. Mildred and Francesca were nearly asphyxiated by the smoke from their *kang*. Mildred fainted.
 31. Mildred had influenza. Eva had it after.
- November 2.* Dr. Kao preached on the Rich Young Ruler. A good number of students attended. Dr. Kao is doing medical work and getting in touch with men of all kinds.

The next thing was to collect some furniture for their new home, but at a carpenter's shop they found only coffins. There were red ones, black ones, and blue ones. Coffins varnished and unvarnished – a rich assortment displayed for their inspection. Finally, however, their landlady was generous-hearted and lent them a table and three stools, and with some timber purchased from the undertaker-carpenter, a cupboard and other furniture was made. Then the second contingent of the students arrived from Kanchow.

The diary continues:

November 3. Students from Kanchow arrived: twenty men and five women.

The arrival of so many made a stir in the city and excited enquiry.

4. The women students started visiting.
5. The Kanchow evangelistic band put posters round the city. Crowds soon read them.
6. Appointed each student his work.
8. The women visited eleven homes. The men distributed Scripture portions.
9. Holy Communion at 8 a.m. — the first time in Suchow. Dr. Kao led. Twenty-one partook.
10. Started classes. Eva on St. John, Mildred on the Acts of the Apostles, Francesca in charge of singing, etc. Morning and evening prayers in Dr. Kao's hands.
11. At the close of the first month in Suchow:—
 - (I) Houses rented.
 - (II) Dr. Kao and a band of thirty (including our three and two servants) established for the preaching of the Gospel and for the witness of Jesus Christ.

A weekly time-table was now working. From Saturday to Monday, students went preaching; from Tuesday to Friday, they studied. People who were interested, especially women, came to the house to ask questions and to discuss with the Trio. Numbers of those attending services were carefully noted; evangelistic bands went into the surrounding country, sometimes a considerable distance away.

'But wait till the winds come,' said their neighbours: 'then you'll see what Suchow is like.' And sure enough, the winds came, howling from the Western Desert with what the Trio described as 'an unearthly yell' . . . 'Without a moment's interruption, the gusts swept in through the paper windows, deluging us with grit as we lay in our beds . . . When daylight came, we found our room literally buried under a thick layer of Gobi Desert dust . . . and for forty-eight hours the fearful blast persisted. But not a drop of rain fell . . . We finally emerged with bodies exhausted and nerves strained by the tension and magnetic quality of the storm.'

What of the conditions in the Desert itself? they wondered. On 5th December, the Trio were invited to a feast at the house of the Governor. He was a Tartar and the Trio met there several other Tartars — and to them every contact was valuable.

So on 16th December, parcels of New Testaments, tracts, pictures and almanacs were sent to six Tartars (whose names are all recorded in their diary).

- December 22.* Molly (the mule they had brought with them from Shansi), was stolen. We sent our cards to the *yamen* before the mule was located . . . Molly found in the temple, at the back. (The priest in league with the robbers had done this.) The next day (December 23), sent our cards to the *yamen*, this time with the message the mule had been found – and *where!* Molly rescued.
24. 6.30 p.m. For the first time Christmas was being kept in Suchow. The whole band went out with lanterns, singing hymns and carols in their different places. Crowds looked on and followed from place to place as we walked. Invitations were given to services tomorrow.
25. First Christmas celebrated in Suchow.
 First Service for Christians at 10 a.m.
 Second Service in open court for Heathen.
 Both services led by Chinese.
 A good lunch, with several plates, eaten together.
 Afternoon: Games.
 Evening: Lantern Service for our people only, with tea and cakes made by our cook.
28. Second Communion Service held in Suchow. Twenty church members present. *Eva administered* . . .

15 – THREE WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY?

‘*Communion Service held in Suchow . . . Eva administered,*’ we read.

What ought we to make of these extraordinary women – unchaperoned, unordained, unmarried, tramping through brigand-ridden China, ‘gossiping the Gospel’? They also tramped through traditions of some of our well known Churches.

Their theology and practice were based on what they felt to be permissible by New Testament teaching. They were impatient with Church divisions and ecclesiastical apartheid, and at times could manifest considerable capacity for indignation on the subject. But their Christian faith was real, compassionate, and alert to human need. Their sole aim was to show forth to ordinary people the words and works of Christ. They did not talk over-much about ‘voiceless, voteless multitudes’ or the ‘undeveloped countries’, they just went. Their religion was happy, and they could laugh at each other – as they did about others – without bitterness. At the centre of their lives burned the conviction that the Christian Way was unique, and that by His life and death on the Cross, Christ had opened up what St. Paul called ‘a new and living way’ to God – and to life itself.

Nevertheless, their activity undoubtedly raises questions. Were they ‘queer’ – or naïve, or were they pioneers? Was it wasted effort –

those voices crying in the wilderness; that spikenard of service poured out in a desert? 'After all,' said a missionary leader about them, 'what is the good of scattering the Gospel where there is no Christian society – no Church?' To this the Trio would have replied, with Wesley, 'Church or no Church, our business is the salvation of souls.' But what was their authority to administer the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion? They were *women*!

The limited ministry of women to small groups and in restricted areas of life – home, school, youth club, hospital, social work, Bible class – has always been an accepted part of Christian activity – ever since Peter's wife's mother had a dose of fever, and John Mark's mother offered the first Jerusalem Christian church a roof, or, indeed, God trusted Mary to be the Mother of Jesus. But that was a long time ago . . .

Among Christian people, when the place of women is under discussion, theory and practice do not always coincide. St. Paul, for instance, talked about there being neither 'Jew nor Greek, male nor female, in Christ . . . All are one.' Yet he was so much a creature of his day (or was he just scared of women and their charms?) that he also talked about 'not suffering women to speak in church'. This, too, was nineteen hundred years ago, but even a hundred years ago Bishop Wilson of Calcutta could not imagine that any 'unmarried female would have thought of a voyage of fourteen hundred miles to find out a sense of duty'. But he did not know our Trio!

What, then, is the reason for this hesitancy throughout the centuries? Is it just that women are *women* – the female of the species? They may serve at the altar, keep the church clean, and even keep it alive. They may sometimes preach in church, and with special episcopal permission, administer the chalice at Holy Communion. In necessity, even the Roman Catholic Church permits the laity, whether male or female, to baptise. But in most of the Churches it is 'so far and no further'. A woman can never be a priest – or should it be priestess? She is a deaconess, a sister, an abbess – provided there is vocation and integrity. She must have the chastity, whether or not her Church exercises the charity.

Yet, one thing is clear: even nineteen hundred years ago Jesus Christ restored to women their equality before God. The Ten Commandments regarded them as 'things' or 'possessions', and Jewry as a whole accorded to women a subordinate place in the community. Our Lord's attitude seems to have been a complete break-through, treating women on an equality with men (John 4.7–27, Luke 7.36–50. Luke 10 28–42). Amongst the men and women who moved in

the entourage of Jesus there was ease and freedom in personal relationships, and this was in sharp contrast with life in the contemporary Jewish community. Women were healed by Jesus; sometimes accompanied Him and his disciples on their travels; were important enough for Him to share with them deep spiritual insights. Theirs were amongst the last lingering loyalties at His Cross, and theirs the first familiar faces to greet Him on Easter morning. All the same, because of the social environment of the time, it would have been difficult and certainly misunderstood had they been numbered amongst the Twelve.

In the New Testament and in the early Church during the time that the deaconess movement flourished, women were ordained to their special work by the laying-on of hands. Generally, they were women in middle life, and were virgins. In Saxon England in a 'double monastery', as it was called, an abbess could have authority over nuns and also over monks. All services were open to women except that of administering the Eucharist. Since the Reformation some continental Lutherans have ordained women ministers, as also have British Congregationalists, Baptists and the Presbyterian Church of England. The United Church of Canada (a union of Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians), and the United Church of Christ in Japan have accepted women into their ministry on the same basis as men, likewise the Methodist Churches in the United States and in New Zealand. In the British Methodist Church some sixty women have had 'pastoral charge of churches', of whom about forty were given 'special dispensation' for fixed periods, and in certain areas, to administer the sacraments. Such changes, slowly overcoming ancient custom, have come about for special reasons: extensive service, at home and overseas, rendered by women to the Church and the community; the developing needs of the Church in an ever-widening world; man-power shortage. A woman, Deaconess Lei, a Chinese, was ordained as a priest by Dr. R. O. Hall, Bishop of Hongkong, to meet a special pastoral difficulty during the war. But the House of Bishops of the Chinese Church refused to accept the situation, and the woman resigned. In the Reformed Churches there appears to be no theological foundation for the exclusion of women from full ordination to the ministry, though there may be other reasons. When men are ordained, it is generally expected that ordination is for life-service, and that the duties of the ministry will not, later, take a second place. A man's ordination vows are set aside only in cases of loss of faith, loss of ministerial vocation, or moral lapse. Could this be said of an ordained woman who, for instance,

married? With a family to care for, could her primary vocation remain unchanged? It is often because of doubts regarding such questions that various Christian Communion, even if they find no theological problem in the ordination of women, have nevertheless hesitated.

And what of our Trio? They were over forty, were spinsters, and no one could doubt their sense of vocation; nor could the possibility of marriage be readily envisaged in the Gobi. The most conscientious churchman would approve at least of their qualifications as deaconesses. But the Trio went further: they administered the Holy Communion and doubtless did so with 'a good conscience, void of offence in the Holy Ghost'. But they did so in Central Asia. Does geography alter the situation?

Concerning the celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion in early times, Bishop Stephen Neill has written: 'There must have been a great many places where on a great many Sundays the Christians assembled for the Eucharist without the presence of an Apostle. Who, then, celebrated? We may suppose that it was a Presbyter: but can it be said that there is any certain evidence? . . . Apart from occasional visitation by the itinerant authorities, it would seem *probable* that one among the Presbyters would come to be regarded as the President and the regular celebrant of the mysteries . . . But about all this, there are still a good many "ifs", and all we are certain of is that there is no certainty.'*

So, perhaps, our Trio, in the distant Gobi were not too revolutionary, after all!

And Eva's diary goes steadily on:

1929.

January 23. This is the last day of the Chinese year, and looking back on the year, at our Thanksgiving Service, we thought of God's goodness.

Dr. Kao told how his little group in Kanchow had prayed for teachers and we had come.

24. The Chinese New Year's Day: students, visitors, with some women, sat with us.

29. Communion Service. Dr. Kao led.

With the women to their farms outside the City Gate. Well received.

30 to February 2. At the fair. Put up tent. Crowds heard the Gospel and bought books.

February 3. Dense crowds. Sold books.

Mrs. Djao took opium because her husband gambled. (He had stolen at least 20,000 cash.) He put the opium by his wife's side and told her

* Stephen Neill & Others, *The Ministry of the Church*, Canterbury Press.

she could take it if she liked. He would throw her out: there were plenty of other women at hand . . . Medicine given her in time. She was saved . . . Djao said he intended to bury his son alive: he was a bad lot and a thief. Dr. Kao got him out of police hands and took him to his own quarters to help him to break off opium.

11. Twenty students returned to Kanchow.

12. Invited twenty or thirty Tartars to drink tea with us, to hear gramophone and see magic lantern. All went off well.

22. Dr. Kao brought a little patient with a frozen foot. She had been cruelly treated by her master, who promised to pay for a woman to look after the child and for food, otherwise, Dr. Kao would take action. All the child's hair on her head rubbed off by carrying heavy bricks on her head as punishment. The child had been sold for 14,000 cash last year by her parents, who were starving.

March 3. The little slave-girl's foot was amputated by Dr. Kao. Mildred gave anaesthetic. Her master was present and was made to take the foot and bury it!

11. The slave-girl's father came to see her. Very poor.

15. Her mother came to see her, bringing a small child of four. She has had seven girls and sold five.

18. With students of newly formed Bible School in Suchow, house-to-house visitation. On first entering a town, the doors are violently closed against the pioneer-missionary, as minds are resolutely hostile to their message. It is uphill work . . .

April 12. Easter Day. Holy Communion Service led by Mildred. Eleven partook. No flowers as yet out, but we placed a bowl of *ma lien* leaves on the Communion Table.

May 4. The child-slave is being taken care of and later returned to her father. Her former master to pay a hundred dollars as compensation for the foot. He was jailed by the gentry of the city. He is no longer permitted to keep slaves . . .

To sum up, a few quotations are relevant. The first comes from that 'father of modern missions', William Carey, Baptist missionary translator: 'In the New Testament, the words "minister" or "ministry" are not used in any professional sense. A Christian minister is a person who in a peculiar sense is not his own; he is the servant of God and therefore ought to be wholly devoted to Him . . . He solemnly undertakes to be always engaged as much as possible in the Lord's work, and not to choose his own pleasure or employment or pursue the ministry as a something that is to subserve his own ends or interests or as a kind of bye-work . . . Miserable accommodation, wretched wildernesses, hunger, thirst, hard work shall be the objects of expectation . . . Thus the Apostles acted.'*

* E. A. Payne, *The Growth of the World Church*, Edinburgh House Press & MacMillan.

The second quotation is from J. B. Phillips, the Anglican New Testament translator:** 'Holy Communion is intended surely for all those who love our Lord and Saviour in sincerity and truth. This mystery cannot be cornered by any denomination and reserved exclusively for the use of its own members. We are one in Christ, whether we like it or not, and whether we approve of the other denominational brethren or not. Unless we are prepared to say that those nurtured in a different branch of the Christian Church are not Christian at all, I, for one, cannot see by what right I exclude my fellow Christians from Communion with our common Lord . . . Must we for ever delve back into the past? Is it not conceivable that the spirit of God could short-circuit our precious traditions and draw all Christians together in this central Act of Worship?'

Finally, two notes from the Trio themselves: In a book entitled *Ambassadors for Christ* they write on the sacrifices of those who are called to special service. A chapter called 'The Right to Romance' seems almost autobiographical. 'The demand on those whose vocation is that of pioneer, pathfinder, roadmaker . . . is to deny themselves even the necessities of life, to say nothing of its softer though perfectly legitimate pleasures. Their duty is to endure hardness, to be good soldiers, unencumbered athletes, unentangled by any weight . . . These demands are, perhaps, only for the few, but there are some to whom they are made. It is a venture, a call, an ordination to special service.'

And in their book *The Making of a Pioneer* they add: 'The missionary pioneer is heaven-ordained, not man-appointed, and blessed is that Society which recognises the Divine Ordination.'

16—FINDING THE WAY

BEFORE they ventured on long excursions into the Desert—some of which would take many months—the Trio decided, whilst still in Suchow, to visit some of the areas lying north-east towards the Mongolian border. The Bible Society had a post at distant Kalgan, situated between Peking and the Mongolian border, and a small city, Kinta, lay between Suchow and Mongolia. Festivals were being held there at that time of the year, April 1925, so it was decided to turn to the north-east.

In notes and letters concerning this trip, the Trio remarked: 'It

** *Appointment with God*, Epworth Press.

* Hodder and Stoughton.

all began on April Fools' Day . . . Our driver evidently thought that our departure gave him latitude for his sporting instinct. He was one of those jolly rascals whose one aim, if you listen to their tales, is to make a record pleasant trip of it.' The visit lasted just over a fortnight and started well enough, for the muleteer made no objection to the weighty packages which were handed to him to store in the two carts. Later, they understood his cheerful mien, for in packing away their baskets, he was also lining the bottom of the carts with a layer of his own goods. When this was discovered, he gaily replied: 'Just a little package more or less, you know! Look at my team – the best in Suchow'

On the morning of the departure, however, the team of animals had been replaced by what the Trio called 'these underfed and skinny mules'. When they were actually on the way, the driver casually remarked that the main road happened to be under water, but he knew every by-path in the district and he would take them on a route which, though it meant an extra night on the road, would avoid mud-pits. So all day they meandered from one by-path to another. At nightfall instead of arriving at an inn they came to a two-roomed house, where already twelve people were sleeping – men in one room, women and babies in the other. A strong wind was blowing, so the Trio turned their cart round against the wind, and prepared to sleep in the open, behind it. Seeing their plight, however, the women made room for them and they entered the house. As they were settling down for the night the carter called to them through the paper window: 'You had better rise at dawn, you know, if you wish to arrive by evening. It is only ten miles, but they are long miles.'

So before sunrise they left the 'Hotel of Lost Illusions', and for hours did not meet a soul. Then a passing traveller asked where they were going. 'To Kinta?' he queried when they told him. 'But you are going in the wrong direction!' With a wink at the traveller, the carter shouted: 'I'm taking this road to avoid mud-pits on the way.' 'Oh, certainly,' replied the traveller. 'This is the right way, and you will find neither pits nor mud' – and he moved on quickly. By this time, the latent capacity for indignation of our Trio was steadily becoming articulate. When they again questioned the carter he raised his eyebrows, and said: 'Oh, you want to get to Kinta *city*? But your man who engaged me said it was Kinta *district*, and we shall enter that in a few hours from here. I understood you wanted to preach the gospel in Kinta *district*.' Stony silence now descended upon the company, to be broken only when they drew near to the house of some relations of his. He told them: 'Charming people, and

a good house – so much better than an inn, you know – more like your own home.’

But before they actually arrived their cart stuck in the mud, and they had to walk, arriving at what they described as a ‘wretched hovel’. To their amazement they discovered that they were actually expected there. They spent the night on damp ground, amid ‘in-describable dirt’, to discover that their carter was actually smuggling illicit goods (hidden in the carts by their ‘godly literature’) for his friends resident in the house. Next day the carter, still cheerful and debonair, introduced them to a youth of sixteen, whom he described as his nephew, with the remark: ‘There are some rivers ahead of you, you know, and oxen are better than mules for crossing water – so my nephew will take you the rest of the way. His name is “Welcome Home.”’ Quite hopeless by this time, the women travelled on with the youth, well knowing there was no danger from swollen rivers at that season. After another two days on the road, they arrived at Kinta in a snowstorm.

Next morning they were greatly cheered to find living at Kinta descendants of people who had actually come from the province where they had spent twenty years – Shansi. They found the city quite interesting, too, and in its most conspicuous building, called the ‘Golden Tower’, they noted the influence of Indian architecture upon that part of China. The festival in honour of a local deity was in full swing, and to the sound of pipe and cymbal, a long procession, headed by the idol, was wending its way through the streets . . . When finally the idol had been replaced in his shrine, a crowd of spectators made a rush for the courtyard where the Trio were staying, to listen to them for over an hour. Contacts opened up. A man who had bought a New Testament in Suchow invited them to his home, where they spent an afternoon talking to him and his family. A Mrs. Ma, something of an ascetic and a vegetarian of the third generation, they found to be extraordinarily understanding in spiritual things and deeply impressed by the story of a Suffering Saviour. ‘The whole city seemed to be a centre of pilgrimage for both Chinese and Tibetans,’ the Trio wrote. ‘Hundreds of shrines stood on the mountain-side and numerous guest houses accommodated thousands of pilgrims. Crowds of women, followed by a military procession and by civic officials, continued to wend their way up the stony valley in an unbroken succession.’

Not infrequently, in China’s mountainous parts, shrines are built into the face of a steep escarpment rising sheer from a plateau. I have seen such places piled up on a cliff-face, tier upon tier, shrines

and temples, grottoes connected by narrow paths hanging on to the hillside, or by tiny wooden bridges precariously clinging to the cliff. The summit is often crowned by a monastery garden of beautiful azaleas—quiet, serene and dignified under the blue canopy of heaven. Such was the group of temples in the neighbourhood of Kinta, where soldiers and officials, young women with babies, old women with bound feet, hobbling up the steep ascent, burned their incense or said their prayer at each rock-shrine. Some called the place 'The Heavenly Road': others, 'A Short Cut to Paradise'.

One week after the Chinese festival came a Tibetan festival, when liturgies were intoned by rows of chanting lamas sitting cross-legged before the Living Buddhas, who remained motionless upon a raised dais. For days the chanting continued . . . Well might the old Psalmist write: 'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul for Thee, my God.'

In her personal diary, Eva wrote:

'April 1-11. Spent at Kinta, just inside the North Gate.' She gave the names of some of the Chinese Christians who had accompanied them from Suchow, and added: 'Every day a Gospel meeting was held in the inner court. Crowds attended. Each day Mildred took a Bible class for the men before they started out (9 a.m.—9.45 a.m.). Each day we visited in the city and the countryside.' Details of homes visited are given with some notes: 'Here a bad opium-smoker . . . husband a gambler.' 'X came to a meal with us.' 'We took three days going . . . took two to return. Left Gospels and other books with Mr. Lin, a merchant in Kinta city. Many books sold and tracts distributed.' To their friends at home they wrote: 'As sowers of the Seed, we have realised that its life is in itself.'

Before leaving Kinta the Trio deposited posters of Scripture passages in many of the shrines, and twelve months later, when they returned, they noted: 'Not one of them had been defaced or destroyed!' They noted, too, that people seemed to be becoming accustomed to seeing their white tent, and to listening, and buying literature. Mildred wrote: 'During such work as this we learned to jostle with the crowds more familiarly than we did in the streets of London, and we found contacts easier'.

It was now only a few days to Easter, so the Trio returned to Suchow to their little flock for the Easter Communion Service.

'The hours from daybreak to sunset we spend in the toil which is the evangelist's daily portion. In our large tent, Chinese preachers take their turn with us in proclaiming the Gospel to a crowd of

inquisitive sightseers, which never tires. A bookstall is placed in the tent, and Francesca stands ever alert for sales! She understands Chinese psychology too, and wraps up the Gospels in bundles which she never appears eager to open! (From the Chinese point of view, if you have a really valuable thing you are not anxious to get rid of it!) Round her table, eager enquirers gather, saying: 'Open that bundle, and let me see what you have there.' Presently, leisurely taking up a small copy of the Gospel, she says: 'Why not take this one?' 'No,' comes the reply, 'that's only a portion. I want the whole Bible: I want the whole thing.' With a reluctant air, she opens her bundles and exposes the treasures to view, and then the brisk sale of Scriptures really begins . . . When evening comes, we are weary with a weariness perhaps only known to preachers of the Gospel in lands where the sun gives one no respite. Sundown and twilight bring relief after the glare and heat. We take an evening meal, and perhaps walk over to the temple courtyard amongst ancient trees.

'One evening, we find the priestly community buzzing with movement. It is the birthday of their god. A brass wash-basin and some beautiful clothes that had been laid out for the use of the idol have been stolen. The priests are downcast, and people stand round and ask how a god who cannot take care of such a small trifle as a wash-basin can possibly protect their whole city. We wander on in the cool evening. Here is a group of men so intent on what they are hearing that they do not notice us. We overhear the speaker. Around him is a group of peasants, hanging on his words. The booklet in his hand, which he is explaining, is a paperbound copy of the Christian Gospel, bought earlier in the day . . .'

Francesca (gradually becoming 'The Barnum of the book-trade', as Mr. Foyle of Charing Cross Road was once called) commented: 'Our books were easy to read, and the things they taught, anyone might understand. They were illustrated by stories that no one who heard them could ever forget. No wonder the crowd pushed and swayed, fearful lest the stock should give out before each individual had secured the prize which he most coveted . . .' She describes a long camel caravan wending its leisurely way eastward, toward the Mongolian sand-dunes and the distant markets of Chinese towns. 'I watched as the laden camels were halted. The merchant whose goods they carried lowered himself to the ground and strode toward us to investigate the unexpected sight of our book-table laden with literature. He turned out to be a traveller bound on a long trek, so long, in fact, that the peaceful autumn season would change to icy winter before he reached his destination. Ahead of him lay long

featureless days, and here, most unexpectedly, was the chance of a book to read on the weary marches! . . . A complete Bible in Chinese was his choice and it was carried off like great treasure, which indeed it is, by this journeyman of lonely stages.

'Yet another figure appears. A man riding a swift camel has sighted our white tent. As he rides his voice is lifted in a strange but not unmelodious song: "Far have I wandered from my sand-girt home: Away in the distant North", he sings. This man hails from Outer Mongolia* – a land long closed to the missionary. Here is a valuable contact, not to be neglected. He must be pressed into service and made to carry books to areas far away. The Gospel (called in Chinese the "Glad Sound") can take hold on a man's mind so that it dominates his thought for life. Probably somewhere in his great sheepskin garment is hidden a bag of gold-dust which could more than pay for the whole table-load of books, but this time it is not money that we are out for. What we want of him is an unconscious service of colportage, so that when he leaves us and rides away his capacious saddle-bags will hold many of those books provided for us by the Bible Society. Lamas all along his way will beg for a volume and offer hospitality in return . . .

'Meanwhile, as we deal with him, an argumentative Muslim Turki is disputing with one of our Christian Chinese. He has picked up a Gospel in colloquial Turki: "You speak of a holy book and then offer me one which is written in a vulgar tongue?" he says. "Shame on you, infidel and eater of pigs' flesh." He spits to show his contempt of all Christians. But the wily Chinese salesman has already substituted a copy of St. Matthew in *Arabic*, and to this Muslim, the sight of those golden characters does something toward silencing his curses. He is not fluent in Arabic, but, as a boy, he has memorised passages from his Koran in a class held at his mosque. Quickly, almost stealthily, he puts the book in his pocket, and goes off – without a word – and without offering to pay for it, either!

One more passer-by attracts Francesca's special attention. It is a Tibetan lama on pilgrimage. 'His long tramp, accompanied with repeated prostration, is nearly over. Now he sees again his beloved snowfields in the foothills, and his heart leaps at the sight. This man, too, must be made a conveyor of the Great Message. We sit together on the sun-baked grit, and for once in his life he hears the Christian message. When I ask him what is the quest of his pilgrimage, he tells me that he, too, seeks "*The Way*" . . . And when, having bought a

* Now an independent state, lying between China and Russia and a recent member of the United Nations.

Gospel, he opens St. John's account of the Good News, his eye will be riveted on the very words with which it begins: "In the beginning was *The Way* and *The Way* was with God and *The Way* was God" . . . The pilgrim hides that volume in the safest of his pockets, and when he reaches his lamasery it will be read and re-read by many other seekers, too.'

And so the Word goes out from Suchow to Central Asia.

'That religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact,' wrote Professor A. N. Whitehead, philosopher and mathematician.

THE GOBI DESERT

17—THE BITTER-SWEET OF A DESERT JOURNEY

‘THE Church does not depend on authority,’ wrote Francis Xavier, ‘but on boiling one’s own clout and washing one’s own pot.’ In addition to the spiritual menus they prepared for other people the Trio had material needs of their own. Before any desert journey considerable preparation was necessary. Their travelling caravan consisted of the cook and one servant they had brought from Shansi, carters, animals, and always a few helpers and hangers-on. All had to be fed. Sometimes the company could ‘live’ on the countryside, and on such occasions they would replenish their food-stocks with melons, pears, grain-cobs and beans, packing these in their baggage in the most unexpected places. To eat a juicy melon or peach may be delightful, but to sleep with it packed in your pillow was not so good. Sometimes for days they were dependent for water on what they could carry with them.

Each person travelling with them was allowed one pound of flour per day, but in difficult spots he would get in addition, only a flavouring of vegetables, the mixture to be eaten with chopped capsicum fried in oil and sharpened-up with tasty, home-made, gravy-like vinegar. As he prepared for a journey the old cook would dip his finger into the viscid vinegar he was pouring into earthen pots, to be corked with corn-cobs, and, smacking his grinning lips, would exclaim: ‘This is *splendid* stuff—very sharp!’ Cucumbers, French beans, lettuce-like leaves would be cut fine, then packed tightly into a basket lined with grease-proof paper to keep them moist and fresh—much as we would use cellophane bags in the West. Fifty pounds of flour would be needed for a four-day or five-day stretch of road, and to prepare it needed care and detailed work. The wheat was measured out, sieved to separate it from dust, tiny stones and husks, then it was soaked for hours in cold water. When the water had been drawn off at dawn next morning, Molly, the gentle mule, would be blindfolded for an exercise in the leisurely toil she knew well. Harnessed to the pole of the grinding-mill, she would walk round and round all day turning a creaking stone which ground the grain to flour. Nearby a hired boy would be sifting the flour,

working the sifter with his feet, and returning the coarse grains to be ground over again.

Somewhere *en route* their bread would be baked in an inn-kitchen on a mud stove fed by sheep-droppings for fuel. For arduous journeys, and particularly the long ones, they would need to bake the flour into loaves before starting. When the dough had risen loaves must be steamed, so a large iron pot of water was put on to a fire of red-hot faggots. Extra 'steamers'—a sort of oven—would be borrowed from friends, so there might be eight layers of small loaves (one on top of the other), with fifteen loaves on a layer, making a hundred and twenty small loaves at one baking. Every nick and hole in the 'steamers' was stuffed with rag, so that the rising steam from the large iron pot below could not escape, and all would cook together. After such a major operation, the cook and his mate 'rested for a day'.

Next in preparation came corn and beans. These had to be dried to avoid fermentation and rotting during travel. Then, mixed with wheat, dried peas, oatmeal, with a touch of hemp and sesame, they would make a tasty Tibetan dish called *zamba*. On such occasions the appetising smell of roasting grain would pervade the household for days, and Francesca, whose task it was to superintend the food preparations, moved from one operation to another. 'Now,' she would say, 'if we are held up by rain, or talk too long, we shall have enough food for everybody!'

Meanwhile Eva attended to her assignment—the propaganda (or rather, propagation) department: packing books, pamphlets, hymn-sheets, posters and especially, copies of the Gospel in half a dozen languages—the supply of which was replenished fairly regularly from Bible Societies in Shanghai, London or New York.

Mildred seems to have kept a sort of sergeant-major's eye on the whole operation, at the same time coping with current affairs and dispensary patients, as well as transport problems. The carter, for example, must see that the harness was well repaired, and for this he wanted two thousand cash (or 2 shillings in good English money). The cart-wheels must be repaired and the animals properly shod. Medicines of many kinds must be readily available on the road, and she dare not forget the dental forceps, for they often worked miracles. Their tiny organ, too, must be tenderly packed; clean linen and bed-bags must be placed where they could be found. So the preparations would go on . . . It is amusing to reflect that when Eva and Mildred had applied (separately and with years in between) to become missionaries in China, their referees in both cases had written

that such was their enthusiasm they 'had not learned to look after themselves'. Francesca could have told a different story.

For man and beast – the whole team in fact – life on the desert approaches was a stern reality. They were a party of eight humans, including their constant companions, Elder and Mrs. Liu, Chinese evangelists, but this time one of the favourite members of the caravan team was missing. Molly, the mule, had always pulled in the shafts, while Lolly, her Shansi colleague, was harnessed in front. Just as the women were a trio, these two were a harmonious duet, but poor Lolly was now no longer with them. On a recent journey she had shown signs of illness, and unwisely the ladies had called in the village vet, who had written out a prescription. Shortly after taking the dose the poor beast lay down in the courtyard of the inn and died . . . 'Molly,' they wrote, 'who in ordinary circumstances would whinny incessantly if separated from her companion, took one long look at Lolly's dead body, heaved a sigh, and never called for her again.'

And now, a rather sad little company, they faced a long journey into the Desert, well beyond the Big Mouth of the Chinese Wall at Kiayükwan. Each time they entered the Desert Eva wrote in her diary two eloquent words: *K'ou Wai*, meaning 'Outside the Mouth'. They had purchased a wooden cart, with wheels eight feet in diameter, giving clearance to their goods over narrow gullies and even deep streams. The cart was covered with a hood, over which, for coolness and for warmth, grass matting was placed – total cost 50 shillings. At first, the season being early, they had used their old light cart, but it was small, whereas the new '*K'ou Wai* cart', as they called it, was lined with felt, and so arranged that two people could lie down side by side on their wadded quilts. They were fortunate in being able to buy a horse, bred in distant Urumchi, and used to the brackish water of the desert. Because of the heat they planned to travel at night.

Starting out from Suchow they approached the Great Wall after a night journey of twenty miles. They wrote: 'The rising sun topped the scalloped ridge of ice-fields on the distant Tibetan Alps, and threw a ray of pink over their snowy slopes. The great mass of the mountain range was still in the grip of the death-like hue which marks the last resistance of the night to the coming day. The morning star was still visible, but it was grey dawn in the plain below. Light was growing rapidly. There was a strange sense of vibration in the air, for the world was awakening!'

In that description one feels that among the Three Women themselves there was a suppressed sense of excitement, as they ventured forth into the open desert.

Outside the Wall the Gobi stretched in flat, stony dreariness, but a few miles further on it developed into a series of undulating mounds and hollows, like the rolling surf on some torrid shore. The horizon slowly changed, becoming a fantastic back-cloth of gruesome shapes and jagged mountain-peaks. The caravan route wound its way over hill and valley. At first it was wide and well-rutted by the nail-studded wheels of ten thousand carts which had passed that way over the centuries. Then it narrowed and its ruts would part, only to meet yet again and once more to part.

From talks with their friends, and indeed, from my own conversation with the Trio themselves, it is evident that each journey they made outside the giant protecting Wall of China was a very real event in their lives, and to face it demanded discipline and courage. For all who in those days passed beyond the pale it was a memorable experience, but for these women it was perhaps something different. To them such journeys represented spiritual and physical fulfilment – in a word contact with *Reality*. They were exactly where the Divine Presence would have them be; at grips not only with exhilarating nature but also with humble, wistful, God-seeking human nature. Silent, still, solemn, as was the sacramental moment each time they ‘went out’ – they knew that they were *alive*. They were involved . . .

Here was encounter with the Universe.

‘What a place of desolation,’ Eva whispered on one occasion as she looked out. ‘Yes, it is desolate,’ replied Mildred, ‘but in the silence God is there.’

‘The place is full of devils,’ said the young soldier on guard. ‘They call out just as a man would if he wanted help. But their next call always leads a little further from the path – never back to the right way.’ Turning to Mildred he said: ‘But perhaps you have some clue as to where the lost ones are?’ ‘Yes,’ she said quietly, ‘I *have a Clue*’ . . .

At evening, before sunset, their carts again clattered over cobblestones – this time out to the wide-open west. Behind them, the Gate swung to. They heard the heavy bolt being pushed home. The carter sighed, and perhaps they, too, felt a pang, for to say ‘goodbye’ was still ‘to die a little’.

Clad in Chinese clothes, feeding as did the peasants, speaking Chinese, the Trio were by now perhaps more Eastern than Western. They were a tiny church in a vast wilderness, which was no longer

just the picturesque phrase of ancient literature, but stark reality, slowly unfolding, panorama-like, mile after mile before them. Would they lose their way in some sandstorm? Would they be broken by the dead monotony? At their age could they stand the strain of heat and cold, thirst and fatigue? These were still unanswered questions.

'All this went on in my mind,' wrote one of them, 'as I walked ahead of the carter for a few miles into the Gobi. The loose stones hurt my feet and seemed almost to cut through my Chinese cotton shoes. The landscape faded into the falling night . . . I began to stumble among the stones, and fearful of losing my way, I climbed up into the cart beside my companions, trusting the beasts, who could see in the dark, to find the track . . .' Hours later — many hours — and from what seemed miles away, they heard the clang of camel-bells, tinkling through the dark stillness. Half an hour on, in the gloom, fifty or sixty camels, with muffled grunts, shuffled past them into the night.

At midnight the moon rose. Even when they lay in the cart none of them could sleep. The desert was bathed in soft light: 'Not even a blade of grass to rustle, a leaf to move, a bird to stir in its nest, nor an insect on the wing,' they wrote. 'No one spoke, we only listened . . .'

Before dawn, they heard again the jingle of hurriedly approaching bells. This time it was the carrier of the mails, riding along on his horse at a sharp canter. Always cheerful, he called out: 'You have still ten miles ahead. There's a river, but at this time its water is shallow.'

Sunrise, and their two carts rolled into a small village. Francesca wrote: 'We met people fresh from sleep, taking up the normal occupations of the day. During the hours of darkness they had been steeped in unconsciousness, now they faced a new day, restored and vigorous. Our own weary beasts, tired carters, and jaded travellers moved wraithlike among them, for all through the night we had been as living creatures who walked among the dead and surprised their secrets, and now in turn, we felt like ghosts in this clear bright world. . . . We had no part in the life of the new day, since for us it must be turned into night. After a bowl of parched cornflour moistened with a little hot water from a thermos, we welcomed the windowless rooms of the dingy inn, spread our coverlets on the mud-bed, flung ourselves down, and fell into deep sleep.'

In a few hours they were awakened by flies from the air-hole in the roof, so they rose, refreshed by sleep and by the stimulus of new surroundings, to walk around a strange village. It was not long

before they found the small general-store, with a few packets of cigarettes for sale, some incense-sticks, twisted packets of red pepper, home-made string, and leather thongs. In the morning sun they sat down on the customers' bench outside the shop, to talk to the owner. 'After answering all his enquiries concerning myself, my age, my journey and my relations,' wrote one of them, 'I took the lead, and in turn questioned him about himself . . .'

That, indeed, was the important part of Mildred's 'Clue' to life: 'I asked him about *himself*.'

18 — A WALL OF SPEARS

AND now for fifteen years in the lives of the Three Women the Gobi and its oasis-peoples become the centre of their effort. 'We travelled over the Desert and among its oases as itinerant missionaries,' they wrote. 'We came to know the country and its people intimately. It had its terrors and it subjected us to many and prolonged hardships, but it also showed us some unique treasures. The oasis-dwellers were poor but responsive; the caravan men were rugged but full of native wit, the outstanding personalities of the oases were men of character and distinction . . .'

This new world they had entered was the largest desert on earth. It was full of contradictions. A battle was in progress: Nature versus human nature. The very ideographs by which the Chinese wrote the word 'Gobi' meant 'A Wall of Spears'. It was not only a desert, it was an aggressive army whose weapons were decay, disintegration, disorder and death. These fought against human hope and order; against life itself and the society of men. Ignorance, inertia, hunger, poverty, disease, erosion, were suffocating the spirit, mind and civilisation of man.

'I have often taken a mental journey back to the days of Alexander the Great,' Mildred Cable once told the Royal Central Asian Society in London, 'to the days when Grecian influence played such an important part in the art and culture of Central Asia . . . I have been offered specimens of Greek sculpture, or I have picked up a brick with a Greek key-pattern on it.'

But it was a different Gobi that the Trio saw. It was not just a matter of lost opportunity which was sounding the funeral-knell of civilised effort. Man himself was in decay, for he had neither the spiritual vitality nor the technical resources to win through, and in her conversation with the oasis shopkeeper, recorded in our last

chapter, Mildred had put her finger on the most sensitive spot in man's whole relationship with the Universe: 'I asked him about *himself*,' she had said. Indeed that was the sort of question which had sent them to the Gobi.

Man has to fight on two fronts: to straighten out and strengthen his own personality, and then to redeem the world and his own environment. 'History is a human drama taking place on the stage of Nature,' wrote a modern historian,* 'setting off personalities against all the rest of creation . . . It is a new kind of life, superimposed on the jungle . . . and the waste . . . The change that can come to man himself may result in transforming his impression of the nature of the Universe as a whole.' And the scientist confirms the historian. 'Compared with his animal ancestry, man may attain . . . a new heaven and a new earth,' wrote Sir E. Ray Lankester.†

These are remarkable words and Christianity fits right into that world-view of things, for it, too, was an interruption in the evolution of natural man in the Ancient World. Christ 'lifted history off its hinges' and gave to man a vision, and a possibility of new vitality — of life lived in a new dimension. Christ saw that man himself and the world he lived in could be transformed. His was the Clue, the Word, which saw that built into the Universe, there was a redeeming principle whereby Love, self-giving, voluntary service, could transform the jungle into the farm, the sword into the ploughshare: the Love of Christ to replace the law of survival only of the fittest. 'Behold,' the Prophet Isaiah had said,‡ 'I will do a new thing: I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.' Redeemed men could redeem their world. Roses could bloom on a dung-hill. Christ and His Cross were not only the Clue — they were at the centre: the bed-rock of our being.

'Running through the Bible,' wrote H. G. Wells,§ 'were very stimulating and sustaining ideas . . . Not only a new kind of community but a new kind of man comes into history.'§

This was the kind of message the Trio believed and taught: new men functioning in a new community. Could anything be more desirable in the wilderness of Central Asia to which they came?

As they wandered during five days towards Yümen, the Trio saw for themselves that Nature was winning the battle with man. Thirty-five miles beyond Yümen, they came to Pulungki — once a city of

* Prof. H. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, G. Bell & Sons.

† *Enc. Brit.* (11th Ed., Vol. 28).

‡ Isaiah 43.19.

§ *A Short History of the World*, Cassell.

fifty thousand people but now a scattered ruin. 'During the next few nights,' they wrote, 'we counted ten more deserted towns and villages. No words can adequately convey the extraordinary sensation evoked by crossing in the moonlight, or in the pallor of dawn, these abodes of the past, where deserted streets are still sometimes clearly defined and where abandoned houses with yawning doorways stand tenantless on either side. From dateless ages, the Gobi Desert has approached with stealthy steps, moving like some sluggish organism, till with soft hungry lips it has seized its prey and absorbed it . . . The surrounding scene is of an unspeakably desolate character, reminding one of a landscape on the moon, only instead of extinct craters, here are dead and forgotten cities, towns and villages.'

One reason for this catastrophe, they were told, was 'Moslem massacres'. Another was the centuries-old attrition of wars. Men hating each other. A further reason was erosion — in part caused by man's own abuse of nature in prodigal methods of agriculture and husbandry. But *why* should the spirit of man be strangled? Why should men go about with hopeless eyes; women become drudges and children cry themselves to sleep from hunger?

The drama of the creeping desert and natural man's inadequacy was heightened when they listened to the myths recounted by the locals. Pungki was poetically called the 'Eden of the human race'; treasure was said to be hidden in underground caves; demons to haunt the neighbourhood and hidden amid some Aladdin's cave were glittering stones . . . But when from time to time this imaginary pot-hole treasure had been sought underground by torchlight, it needed only the screech of a bird or the rush of a bat's wings to arouse the superstitious fear of the seekers and blanket their courage. 'One can wander from end to end of these lonely, melancholy, derelict cities, where on stormy nights the swirls of sand spin down the forgotten avenues like dancing dervishes,' the Trio wrote.

As they went on, the will-o'-the-wisps of nature seemed to pursue them, also. 'Again and again,' they wrote, 'our field-glasses assured us of the existence of a large lake, whose shining waters were bordered by standing trees, but as we came nearer there was only . . . sand.'

When they reached Ansi, some fifty miles up the road, it, too, seemed to be menaced by the same encroaching sand, which had drifted as high as the walls of the town, 'bidding fair to disappear altogether under the encircling dunes . . . It was a cold, wind-swept place,' they recorded. 'The wind blew every day and in the winter shops were closed and everything was at a standstill. Every house-

hold lived, ate and slept on its dung-warmed *kang* . . . many whiled away the weary hours with the fumes of the opium pipe.'

Yet Ansi, half-dead, was situated at a strategic centre on the Old Silk Road – a place where important routes forked – one leading north-west to Hami and the Russian Border, and the other branching southward towards Tunhwang, Tibet and India. It had a history, too, but what the Trio saw was history in reverse. Progress towards civilised living is never automatic, and the Trio might well have shouted aloud across that dying world the words of H. G. Wells – 'Wanted – A New Kind of Man and a New Kind of Community'. That was what their Bible was about.

Many have offered solutions to man's dilemma. 'World trade and industry are the true destiny of humanity,' wrote an optimistic English merchant of 1830. 'The machine is our redeemer,' said the revolutionary Russian of 1930. An official textbook published by the People's Republic of China in 1950, says: 'In pre-liberation days the oil industry in Yümen was operated on only a small scale. Now Yümen has grown into an oil city . . . Woollen mills are being built in Lanchow . . . The city of Sian is now a busy centre of the cotton textiles and electrical equipment industries.'

Trade, industry, technology, education – *all* are necessary; all take of the gifts of nature for the benefit of human nature, but one essential ingredient is still missing. It is man *himself*, unique, amongst the creatures on earth. Has he the will and the *goodwill*?

The travels of the Trio as we know were generally arranged to fit in with some religious festival or fair at an oasis town. When inns and cities were overcrowded they would pitch their sleeping-tent on a ridge just outside.

At such times the priests, too, were busy men.

'You have had a busy day,' one of the Three remarked to a temple priest. 'Yes, and you also, I believe,' he would reply courteously, 'and I have not had the time to come and listen to you. What is it that brings you so far?'

'Have you ever heard of Jesus?' they would ask him.

'Yes, I did hear of Him once, in a temple, where the priest said that he believed in Jesus of Nazareth . . .'

The conversation would begin, the moon would rise and the stars become silent before the talk ended. The Trio would write in their diary: 'It was all about God and the approach to God.' It did not seem at all strange to a Central Asian wayfarer that someone should have travelled thousands of miles to talk about the things of God . . .

'Lama, you look tired,' they would remark.

'Yes, I have walked for eight months to get here. I have come from the east, seeking the land where the sun sets and where I can find God . . .'

'I would walk from here to Lhasa,' said a soldier to them, 'if only I could wash from my hands the stains of blood . . .'

Moving over these wide open spaces at the rate of three miles an hour, they wrote that it could not be by chance that 'we made so many contacts'.

The strange fellow who lived in a cave invited them to a meal of camel's milk and parched corn. Those aboriginal people from the hills with blue eyes and fair hair offered them yak-meat, with cream clotted to a cake by boiling. A Tibetan pilgrim came into their tent to drink tea. 'I want to find the *Way*,' he said gravely. Some sought Mildred's medical aid for sickness or a pain. Women in child-birth needed Francesca's skill.

And there was the lighter side too.

They met an amusing troupe of actors, twenty or thirty strong, shabbily dressed, walking jauntily along the Silk Road, carrying boxes strung between them on bamboo poles. In the boxes, the Trio learned, were clothes, tinselled headgear, flowing Mandarin beards made from yak-tails. Before long, the troupe was lumbering through the oasis-town, displaying their antics to the multitude. Out came the players and musicians on to an open-air stage, to the accompaniment of crashing drums, and clanging cymbals, with flutes and pipes pulsating on the desert air—enough to waken the dead! The three Western women wrote: 'The effect on these isolated oasis-dwellers was almost hypnotic.' When the show began the people sat gazing in silence, drinking it all in. An actor who had left the stage for the next scene came back to explain to the audience what he was going to do and what he was supposed to have been doing. The performance lasted for eighteen hours. Men stood until midnight watching the play, but when darkness fell small children could stay awake no longer and tired women, on foot since dawn, were glad to make their children's fatigue the excuse for bed. Finally, the visiting crowds sought some corner for sleep—probably on the temple veranda. After three days, the actors gone, the desert-dwellers slowly drove their bullock-carts homeward, back to reality and the monotony of their poor farms.

One long strip of road ran through what was called the 'Black Gobi'. The Trio found it specially lonely and desolate. On the way-side they noted a heap of what appeared to be abandoned sheep-

skins, but when the driver of their cart touched it, it moved. A man's head protruded, and a husky voice muttered, 'Water.' Mildred got down from the cart and gave him the drink he needed, but they had not sufficient water to leave with him. He was a sick man who could not be abandoned, so for the rest of the journey they took it in turn to walk that he might ride to the next oasis inn. In a few days he recovered and they found him to be an educated young man who had come from a distant part of China to seek work.

At each of their inns, they endeavoured to have family worship, inviting other guests to join with them. Their reception varied. There was the Mohammedan merchant who bowed his head as he heard the women pray for the safety of travellers on the road. There were the soldiers who packed up their gambling kit and gathered up their cash to buy gaily bound Gospels. There was the old woman they had found living alone in a miserable hovel, but whose life-long desire, she said, had been to be well-pleasing to the gods by her personal discipline and purity of life. There was something inexpressibly moving in the way she listened to the story of Christian love and the self-giving of Calvary. They taught her a brief prayer, and when, after a few days, on their return to Suchow they went at dawn to bid her farewell, before she permitted the sacred words of the prayer to pass her lips she washed her face and combed her hair, feeling it to be disrespectful to address God unprepared.

In those New Testaments the Trio were so keen to circulate, St. Paul's words set forth man's dilemma and his only hope. 'The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own . . . The hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay . . . It is plain to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail—painful tension, while we wait for that redemption!'^{*}

And in a little book called *What it means to be a Christian*, the Trio wrote of the way that universal tension is individually resolved: 'It means that a living Person who was Jesus Christ has touched you, changed you . . . Every faculty of mind and spirit throbs in response to the life-giving Word.

*'Heaven above is brighter blue,
Earth around is sweeter green:
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen.'*

^{*} Romans 8, J. B. Phillips' translation, Bles.

19—GATHERING CLOUDS

'WHEN only one opinion is tolerated in public life, every word that does not conform to this has the effect of a bomb. In this way, the word of the Church assumes an entirely new significance.' So wrote an imprisoned pastor of the minority Confessional Church in Nazi Germany.

One cannot compare the tolerance of the easy-going life of Old China with the organised police state which was Germany, but when in any close-knit community the vested interests of the priesthood or the people are threatened by fresh ideas from outside, trouble is on the way.

During those first months in 1925, things seemed to be going well for the Trio. Crowds gathering at the Christian meetings held in Suchow City were growing. Praise for the school work, medical work, the Bible classes, was spoken in the bazaars, and the little group of committed Christians slowly increased in quantity and in quality of life. The Trio noted with joy indications of increasing care for the widow, the orphan and the aged. New concern about the rights and welfare of other people seemed more apparent. Some Christians who had formerly grown opium on their farms now grew wheat, even though it was only one-fifth as profitable. But the temple priests were restless, for their idols were threatened. Difficulties arose, and some of the cattle in which (having no bank) the local Christian community had invested its small resources, died rather mysteriously. This was only the beginning. Dr. Kao, who had accompanied the Trio in their early months in Suchow, had now returned to Kanchow, and he, too, was finding things difficult. Government revenue from opium was beginning to diminish due to Christian farms growing other crops, and it became evident that plans were being laid against the Church. A group of local thugs had apparently been engaged to pick a quarrel with a band of young Christians, and real trouble began at an open-air meeting. The preaching and the book-selling of the Christians were said to offend the local deities. Some of the listening crowd joined in the fracas and blows were soon being exchanged. Benches, broken up, were used as weapons, and when it was all over a well known town-beggar was lying dead, and Christians were being blamed for having killed him. Shortly afterwards a score of Christian farmers, who had not even been present at the meeting, were arrested and sent to prison without trial.

In June 1925, following a long itinerary, the Trio visited Kanchow again, and during a rest-period wrote a long letter to friends in Britain: 'Our reception in Kanchow touched us deeply. Men, women and children tramped outside to meet us and a feast was given to us. Children entertained us with songs and recitations . . . But the spring months have been epoch-making in the history of the Kanchow church. An organised attack was made on a band of preachers at a village fair, and in the mêlée an old beggar was killed . . . It transpired that the old man's life had been 'bought' for the purpose—such things can be done in China. Twenty-one men were put in prison; many of them were not in the village at all. They were incarcerated in a rat-infested hole, and as a result of this and the beatings one man died . . . Meanwhile, the sufferings of the village Christians have been terrible. Numbers of them have been hung up by their thumbs in the temple, beaten, and told that nothing but the signing of a ticket of recantation can save them and their homes from destruction. The details of some cases bring the year 1900 vividly back to our memories. We are thankful to say that no Church member has recanted . . .'

The letter continued: 'The summer term of Bible School is just opening and will keep us busy until we leave for the fairs of Shantan and Hongshui. At the close of last Sunday morning's service fifty-two men gave in their names as desiring baptism at the coming Church Conference . . . One of the difficulties of the last half-year has been the long periods when we have been completely cut off from postal communications, due to the fighting in Honan. Many letters have been lost, but every letter received has been acknowledged by us . . . At present we are suffering from drought—a most unusual thing in these parts, where we depend for water upon melted snow far more than rain. Last winter the snowfall was slight, and wheat is dying . . . The streets are lined with rows of withered tree branches, to call the attention of the gods to the sad state of the crops . . . In the church, prayer is being made.' The Trio wrote that Dr. Kao had appealed to the authorities concerning the imprisonment of the young Christian farmers, but when he had refused a rather shady compromise he lost the favour of the local Government. Fortright and frank as he had always been, others of his enemies came forward in Kanchow, led by an influential merchant who had once offered considerable help to Dr. Kao's mission hospital on the condition that the doctor would change his attitude to the opium trade. The gift had been refused.

Some months later matters came to a head when Dr. Kao, walking

in the street, saw several soldiers of the rather undisciplined army of General Feng beat up a young peasant in a back alley of the city. One of the troops had raised a hammer to strike the head of the peasant, who was on the ground, but Dr. Kao threw himself on to the victim, taking the blow on his own body. This was something new. Staggered that anyone would so help a peasant the soldiers drew off, but as they did so Kao picked up the cap of one of them, saw the number on it, and said: 'This is a matter for legal enquiry. If this peasant has done something wrong, take him to the Mandarin.' The soldiers followed Kao to his home, pleading that he would let the matter drop – which finally he did.

Meanwhile a hundred and twenty miles away in Suchow, during the winter of 1925, the Trio continued their work, making several expeditions into the Gobi Desert. But in January 1926 they, too, began to feel a new pressure upon them and their work. Their carter, Yu, who had gone to an outlying village to buy corn for the mules, was stopped on the road. Soldiers commandeered the cart and the two mules which drew it. When the carter objected he was beaten up, filth was rubbed into his wounds, and he was left lying on the road. On hearing of this Mildred and Francesca went out immediately to photograph the wounded man, by way of evidence. General Feng, who was sympathetic to Christian work in China, and who at that time of civil war governed Kansu Province, was informed and a soldier was arrested. Word was sent that if the carter died (and he was now very seriously ill), the soldier would be executed. On hearing this, the other soldiers in their barracks were furious that for a mere peasant one of their number was in danger, and due to their threats, anxiety overshadowed the mission compound for days, and many prayers were made. Happily, the man recovered.

About this time, the Trio were writing again to friends at home from Suchow. 'We have twenty-three men and women from Kanchow, and several more from this city staying with us. We have been obliged to refuse many others, for everything in Suchow is now double the price of last year . . . With this band we start the winter's campaign. Since April we have spent 135 days in Chinese inns, and we feel competent to supply intending travellers with all information regarding management, cuisine, accommodation and prices of all hostelries in north-west Kansu! With our students, house-to-house visitation in this city is now taking place . . .' The church in Suchow was growing. A Moslem merchant became Christian, and his wife was so impressed by his changed treatment of her that she, too,

joined the little church. Crowds which listened were larger, and the quality of life in the Christian community seemed to be softening the rather hard lines of Chinese custom: indifference to cruelty, opium-smoking and the rest. Slowly the impact of the little Christian group was influencing a wider circle.

But around the Trio, as in all China, there was restlessness and civil war. General Feng ordered a new motor road to be built through Suchow. The walls of the city were placarded with proclamations forbidding soldiers to oppress the people or exploit the farmers . . . but often such orders remained a dead letter. Despite the civil strife and a growing suspicion of Christians amongst those with vested interests, Eva's diary runs:

December 25. Second Christmas kept in Suchow. Carol-singing in streets.

Great crowds. Reception of students in our house.

11 a.m. Service.

1 p.m. Dinner all together.

6 p.m. Magic lantern. (Note. 300-600 present at Children's Service, including many adults.)

Then matters began to take a serious turn. On 17th February, 1926, Eva records: 'Dr. Kao was arrested in Kanchow and put in prison.' The Trio wrote a long circular letter to friends at home dated 25th March from Suchow: 'Dr. Kao is enduring his sixth week of imprisonment in the room reserved for criminals of the lowest type. The trial has hung fire because the accusing party is unable to collect evidence against him, and a Commissioner from distant Lanchow must come to judge the case. Messages have reached us privately, suggesting that were we to approach the higher officials with a request for Dr. Kao's liberation, it might be effective. Acting, however, in accordance with a determination of the Christian community that nothing of the kind should be allowed to interfere with a thorough judicial enquiry, we have taken no action. The feeling of the ordinary people in the city remains friendly, and attendance at the services is in no wise diminished. The whole incident seems attributable to animosity among the soldiers. The effects of the anti-British and anti-Christian movement is also felt elsewhere, but such an aggressive Christian propagandist as Dr. Kao cannot fail to be called to suffer for his faith . . .' 'The work of the past winter has been full of encouragement. Perhaps the most cheering feature is that it has been worthy of such an attack. The daily services are well attended. Forty ladies have entered their names for the study of the Chinese phonetic script.'

'In two weeks we hope to accept an invitation from a Tibetan Lama to visit his camp. Compared with a Chinese, a Tibetan is as spontaneous as a child! Incidentally, the only foreigner whom the Lama had previously met before meeting us was a Siberian, whom he also described as "foreign devil!" He was puzzled as to what he should call us, for, of course, we too are foreign. "Call them Teacher," someone suggested to him. "Sure thing," he said: "a fine name. They stand on that platform and talk until their throats must be dry! I will call them Teacher, and keep the kettle boiling to serve them with tea when they are thirsty!" . . .'

Dr. Kao, it turned out, was accused of having led an armed mob to break open the prison to release a certain Moslem prisoner. One of his chief accusers was the governor of the prison, and he turned out to be the master of the little slave-girl whose diseased foot Dr. Kao had amputated and whom the doctor had made to bury the foot!

For forty-two days Kao had been kept in prison without trial, and so verminous was his cell that he asked for quicklime to scatter under the boards of his *kang*. Then word came that he was to be tried in Lanchow, and he left to travel on foot a journey of eighteen days. There he was permitted to live with friends, of whom he had many, since he had been on the staff of the Borden Memorial Hospital. After several more months, he was acquitted, and General Feng appointed him to be Medical Officer-in-Charge of the Red Cross at the military hospital in Lanchow City.

Despite the rising tide of suspicion, and the recruiting and marching of soldiers, the Three Women continued with stoic courage, trusting God and knowing His guidance. China was in turmoil, life was insecure. 'Under Feng,' said the recruits, 'you must fight.' When the recruiting officer came along, they remarked: 'What is the use of good pay if you die?' When he had gone, his posters quickly disappeared.

During this time, Eva recorded:

May 10-14. Spent at Wan Shun Shan, with preaching band—twelve people in all. Slept in tents. Good preaching opportunities.

19-20. Tibetan fair . . . fewer people than last year.

24. Dr. Kao visited.

30. Baptised three women in the River.

Later, Communion service and reception of new members.

June 11-26. We left Suchow again for *K'ou Wai* 'Outside the Mouth'.

They were on the Gobi trail again. 'He rides at ease, who is carried by the grace of God,' wrote Thomas à Kempis.

20—THE STORY OF 'LITTLE LONELY'

IN Asia all must work, and nearly thirty years before, one of the early impressions the Trio had gathered when they arrived in China had been the number of children who, even when they were tiny toddlers, looked so serious, as they helped swell the family income by hawking food, running errands or collecting dung for the family *kang*.

So children's 'sing-songs' at the home of the Trio had come as a welcome change, especially when the youngsters were allowed to play the drums and the tambourines. Parents had followed their offspring and almost every night had become a 'music night'. It had not been long before some tiny hand would guide one of the Trio to her home at 'Mum's' invitation. Thus the circle of their contacts had widened. When they had journeyed to Suchow they had adopted the same technique of communication.

It was not for nothing that Suchow was called the City of Prodigals, and soon the Trio were writing to friends at home about the orphans they had found, who from the age of six had to look after themselves. So on winter nights a large room with dry, warm straw welcomed lonely children, who slept peacefully until next morning when a bowl of hot porridge would start them off on another day. There were other problems, too, for China's children. Laws passed after the Revolution of 1911 endeavoured to protect them from child marriage, but to put the law into effect meant appealing to a Magistrate, and sometimes the Trio had to help. One of the first children to seek them out in Suchow was a well-developed girl of eleven, whose mother had died. Her father had then sold her off to an older man who was an opium smoker. Terrified, she resisted him and was beaten. Then he took away her clothes, and naked, she fled to hide in the fields. Hunger soon drove her to the house of a woman she knew to be Christian, who in turn brought her to the Trio . . .

And so it was with many another, until the tiny tots gathered around their court were sometimes known as 'the Trio's Children'.

At one of the well known festivals held in the precincts of a lamasery away in the Tibetan foothills, a Chief from distant Mongolia arrived each year. Simple but proud, he felt himself to be

rather a country lout amongst all this pageantry. But when the dancing began and the night fell, it became a 'free for all'. So he, too, joined in lustily. When it came to choosing his partner – he did so, too . . . The next day, like many another man before him, whether in the West or in the East, he went his way, without a thought of consequences or compassion. But later, to a Tibetan peasant woman living not far from the monastery, an unwanted girl-child was born, and after three weeks, a relative of the woman took a journey to Suchow and sold the babe for eighteen pence. The woman who bought the bairn had no children of her own, and was proud to have this pretty little olive-skinned child under her roof, and she dressed her well. But as time passed the foster-mother became alarmed, for it was evident that the little thing could not hear, and later still, she perceived that the child could not speak. Something was wrong: she was a *ya ba* – a deaf mute. The pretty frocks were put away; the pride in her little slave vanished, for in a natural world, unredeemed by Christ, abnormality in one's family is a stigma. Later, when the foster-mother herself gave birth to a son, the bitter end had come for 'Little Lonely'. The woman who had bought her had not got her money's worth – so at the age of six, the child had to fend for herself, by begging for food. Her plight became a byword in that quarter of Suchow City. Known to everybody, left alone by everybody, she was a stranger whom no one took in. Ordinary beggars, of whom there were enough, could cry aloud to passers-by: Old 'Ragbag', for instance, could yell; 'Mrs. Bless-and-Curse' could weep and yell, according to the treatment meted out to her; 'Old Mother Hubbard' (as the Trio called her) would borrow babies and teach them to wail in chorus, but 'Little Lonely' could only tap with a stick. Clad in rags, she went from door to door, and from court to court. Often, too, other children mocked her, and when the fierce watch-dogs in any court-yard came near, she could not hear them and they would bite her feet and legs until they sometimes bled.

There was one home in Suchow, however, where there were no fierce dogs, and eventually the beggar-child came upon it. As she had done at other doors, she tapped with her stick, and then stood in the shadows to avoid rebuff and perhaps a menacing dog. But this time when the door opened Mildred Cable came out. 'Where do you come from, my child?' she asked. But the girl, thin, dirty and with bleeding feet, only pointed to the dog-bites, and held out her bag for food. 'She can't speak,' said Mildred, and half-turning to someone inside: '*What* a poor mite!' Out came Eva, and soon, Francesca carrying food.

Next day there was another visitor. It was the child's foster-mother — 'dressed up to kill'. In haughty tones she claimed damages for the bites that the fierce dogs of the three 'foreign devils' had inflicted on her 'poor little girl' yesterday. Here the Trio's cook, who had overheard, intervened and he told the woman in no uncertain terms what *he* thought! 'We have no dogs here,' he said, 'and what is more the ladies have actually bandaged the legs of your good-for-nothing child with their most expensive ointment!' For good measure he added: 'You are a fine one to dress up, and your child with not a rag to cover her. Why does she go begging?' — on which the foster-mother began to blame the child. 'She is a little idiot to have misled me. I will thrash her for that.' Here Eva took up the matter. 'You had better not talk about thrashing her, for when a woman dressed as you are, drives her child out to beg, she may get into trouble with the authorities.' The woman went off, with the cook telling Mildred that she was 'a bad lot'.

Matters could not rest there, so a little plot was laid. A neighbour, Old Granny Fan, who knew the gossip of the whole neighbourhood, was sent to find out all about 'Little Lonely' and her woman-owner. After a few hours, she returned to say that the child was a slave and not the woman's daughter. Some of the other children who came to the sing-songs now had stories to tell about 'Little Lonely'. 'Little Fragrance', 'Tiny Moth', 'Wee Pup' (who played the flute in the children's band and was so-called to deceive the spirits), 'Scraggy Boy', and 'Tiny Treasure' — they all knew 'Little Lonely', and some of them lived close to her. 'Her mother hits her,' said one. 'She is a bought-child,' said another. 'They beat her.' 'She screams in the night and they don't let her sleep on the *kang*. She has to sleep on the mud floor.'

'Well,' said Mildred, who was listening, 'I hope *you* are not unkind to her.' 'Oh, no, we wouldn't do that,' said 'Little Sapphire', 'I gave her half a potato one day.'

As time went on, 'Little Lonely' made a practice of coming each day to the home of the Trio for a bowl of hot soup and a piece of bread.

'She will be all right now,' said the neighbours. 'The Christians are always kind.'

When the Trio went on their journeys in the surrounding countryside, their Shansi cook was in charge of their house. When they came back and asked about 'Little Lonely', he would reply: 'Oh yes, I fed her every day, but what an appetite! She eats more than me.' On one occasion when they returned though the dog-bites had

healed, there were burns on the calf of her leg, where her foster-mother had put a hot poker.

Slowly, in that quarter of Suchow the attitude towards 'Little Lonely' was changing. Seeing the example of the Trio the children who attended their sing-songs were ready to defend her. Their parents and others, hearing of the attitude of the Christian women, would give the child a coin, and perhaps food. But 'Little Lonely' herself hated to beg and often her Mongol pride was not satisfied unless she rendered some service when gifts were made to her. She could sweep the court, gather dung for a fire, or run an errand . . .

Here we must anticipate our story for as we shall later see, a day came in 1926 when the Three Women were due to return home to England for leave. What was to happen to her when that time came? When they did actually leave, 'Little Lonely' followed them through the Suchow streets as their cart, laden with luggage, made its way. On through the suburbs she followed them . . . They had already made arrangements with a neighbour, Mrs. Ma, and their cook, that 'Little Lonely' should have a hot meal every day. But the face of the child! That pathetic little figure, following them! The utter sadness in those eyes almost tore the heart from Mildred. When they got into the open country she could stand it no longer. She stopped the cart and went back along the road to 'Little Lonely', telling her firmly that she *must* now go back or she would lose her way. So back she went . . . but her little face haunted the Trio for weeks.

Many months passed while the Trio were in Europe and it was 1928 before they got back to Suchow. Every day 'Little Lonely' went to the empty court. After she had been fed she would walk around forlornly and then go away. In north-west China that winter was one of the severest for many years. Beggars crowded round temple buildings, and almost every morning some child or old person would be found frozen to death. The little Christian community opened a room for small children, that they might sleep on the straw-strewn floor.

Then one day before the winter quite ended, 'Little Lonely' came to the court as usual to find baggage strewn all around, the cook very talkative, and Mrs. Fan all excitement: the Trio were back! When she saw them she gave a shriek of joy and rushed into their arms. They, too, were greatly moved and relieved to see her again. As a present they gave her some hand-woven cloth, which had been made up into trousers similar to those worn by other Chinese girls. When she went home that night her foster-mother, who had now turned to opium-smoking, took off the trousers and sold them. This

proved to be the last straw, so another plot was laid. The Trio sought out a wealthy merchant whom they knew to discuss the matter. He suggested that the only way to help the child was for them to buy her from the woman. So after bargaining, conducted by Chinese friends, 'Little Lonely' was bought for the sum of 17s. 6d., and the local Mandarin officially stamped the document of adoption. It was Christmas Eve, 1928, when 'Little Lonely' became their child. She was given her first bath, a pair of padded blue cotton trousers, with a little white jacket and a coat of dark blue. Her scarred legs were covered with white calico socks, and during that Christmas, she moved proudly around in an old pair of Mildred's slippers. Three times in gratitude the little *ya ba* bowed low to the Three Women, and then once to Granny Fan. That night, sleeping in a room with Granny Fan (who had also come to live with the Trio), 'Little Lonely' and the old lady knelt down in thanksgiving.

But she had moved about in a hard world, living on her wits. It had been a jungle of dogs, beggars, hunger, poverty, cruelty, in the struggle for survival. Now she had much to learn and something to unlearn. She was thrilled when they taught her to sew, but when she was asked to do some small job in the house she let it be known quite emphatically that she would obey when she had finished her sewing! When children's parties were being prepared and cakes were lying around she would make quite sure that she had her share (and a bit more) long before her turn came! But slowly she was developing a conscience. At the approach of the Trio she would begin to shake her head, to indicate that she had not been guilty, of this or that, even before she was asked!

During the week, like other children, her trousers would be bound around the ankle for the practical needs of everyday life. On Sundays she wore her best trousers, wide open at the ankle, showing smart clean white socks above blue felt shoes. Sundays, too, were the days for sing-songs, cakes and sweets, when a crowd of children came to the house, and 'Little Lonely' had every opportunity to help herself — and often did. On one occasion, when she had prematurely helped herself to the sweets, and Mrs. Fan had come on to the scene, she hurriedly stuffed the stolen sweets into the top of her trousers, forgetting that it was Sunday and that they were open at the ankle. Poor 'Little Lonely'! Out rolled the accusing sweets, rattling across the floor.

But she was now a different child, intensely happy, though sometimes life seemed complicated with all this honesty business. Put her

on a pony, or let her handle a restless horse, and you knew immediately that she was a Mongol—sure, fearless, proud. It was not for nothing that she had learned self-reliance. Even if, at times, she proved difficult, her pretty face would suddenly wrinkle up in a merry smile—so different from the seriousness of some of the street children amongst whom she used to live. She was happy, but still—she was a *ya ba*.

To be called 'Little Lonely' was quite impossible, for now she was the child of a Christian home. She *belonged*, so the Trio agreed to call her Ai-Lien, meaning 'Love-bond'. So Ai-Lien became her name to the Chinese people. But for her, lip-reading was still the only way of knowing what people said, and the word Ai-Lien was difficult for her to read in that way. To solve this problem, the Trio decided to call her 'Top-sy', which, with its clearer articulation, she understood . . .

One of the intriguing events for any visitor to China used to be to learn what the ordinary people intended to call you—what your Chinese name was to be. (I, myself, was thus 'christened' in a Chinese police-station by a Chief of Police.) . . . Mildred Cable's Chinese name was Gai. So when, in later years, Ai-Lien needed a British passport, it was Mildred's name she took. Her name of 'Ai-Lien Gai' became 'Eileen Guy'—and so it is today.

21—A THOUSAND BUDDHAS AND A CRESCENT MOON

THEIR next itinerary out from Suchow was to take them off the main North-West Road. After passing through Yümen to Ansi, they would turn south-west, planning amongst other things to visit the Caves of The Thousand Buddhas.

Beyond Ansi, four hard days' travel faced them to Tunhwang, and they had been warned to fill every available water-vessel they could carry, and to pack every remaining space in their carts with food for themselves and their animals. Bleak mountains lay along the track, which for miles were void of vegetation. When they were actually on the way, even the few inns along the route turned out to be mere rough shelters, and any water available was brackish. They travelled by night, and the road, lit by starlight, glistened with crystalline formations hard on the feet of both man and beast. As the days passed and they drew nearer to the town, they felt that they

must surely reach a decent inn somewhere, for by now they were fairly exhausted, due to the cold and to the poor accommodation they had found en route. But on arriving at the last inn they were warned by the inn-keeper that both food and fodder were in short supply, and in any case, their animals could be given only one feed. So after a rest of a few hours they started off at 4 a.m., as their record says 'chilled to the bone by a biting wind, and utterly weary for want of sleep'. Unlike the North-West Road, on this new track even the lone telegraph line had abandoned them, their route being traced only by occasional desert landmarks.

Just when they were getting rather desperate, they came across an old woman, living in a tiny hut alongside the road. Seeing their plight, she lit a fire, and with a handful of herbs in a pot of boiling water made a hot infusion, which helped considerably to restore them. They were grateful, indeed, for their path had varied in altitude from three thousand to eight thousand feet above sea-level, and they had still six hours to go to the Tunhwang area, where they knew that an oasis fair and festival were to be held. Before sunrise they had another piece of good fortune. They stumbled across a bundle of straw in the road, probably dropped from a farmer's cart, and numb with cold, there on the track, they lit a fire to warm themselves.

Near Tunhwang, twenty miles away, at the foot of the Altyn Tagh, lay famous caves. Fewer Mongols now frequented those particular shrines, for the spread of lamaism in Mongolia meant that new shrines had been erected there. The Tunhwang Caves were well known, and dated back to 165 B.C. The Trio had always been deeply interested in archæological matters, and as I write I have before me in a well-bound exercise-book an extensive list, written in Eva's hand, of books on the subject, with particular reference to Central Asia. Against each title is a brief summary of its contents.

Many of the Tunhwang Caves held figures of the Buddha, and other antiquities were said to be hidden away within them. Documents in Brahmi script had been found there, with manuscripts in a distant orthography of Aramaic origin. So for the Trio, the visit this time meant not only their work of evangelism, but also a glimpse into the history of Central Asia.

The country around Tunhwang changed rapidly from the gravel track along which they had come. Fresh water flowed underground from the distant Tien-Shen mountains and the result was a luxuriant stretch of fruit orchard and vineyard, with acres of cotton and cereal. On some of the hillsides, sheep, antelope and wild camel grazed,

and here, for relaxation as for their work, the Trio planned to spend fourteen days or so. The town itself was a pleasant little settlement, where pear trees lined the roads, and locally grown melons were famous. It was October, and a touch of early frost was turning the leaves into a glorious flame-colour, with red, brown and orange shades. After their gruelling journey, the beauty of this oasis was long remembered by them – particularly when they discovered its precious antiquities only a few miles away.

The road from the south brought visitors from distant places. If Mongol Buddhists were less frequent visitors, an increasing Moslem population of Turkis was rapidly taking over more of the area. The remaining minority population of aborigines, however, still spoke with pride of their past, and liked to think of Tunhwang as it had once been called – ‘Little Peking’. The place was still strategically important, and the inhabitants were proud that a military commander was one of their residents.

Once the Trio had rested, visitors began to call on them, and amongst the first were women from the distant city of Kashgar, the largest market in East Turkistan, over a thousand miles away as the crow flies. The journey took fifty days, but constant caravans of Kashgar merchants with dozens of their little donkeys passed through the eastern suburb of Tunhwang where the Trio were staying. The ‘Moon Festival’ had already begun; streets were packed with people and stalls were laden with inviting fruit – nectarines, grapes, apples and pears.

Every Western traveller to India or Eastern Asia knows that for charm and beauty, the fashions in female attire of these parts can compete with anything that the most renowned salons of Paris have to offer, and the women visitors from Kashgar who called on the Trio were no exception. They were tall, elegant and graceful. Being Moslems, their faces were partly veiled by a finely woven material, which flowed below the waist over long, close-fitting gowns of brilliantly tinted fabric, the diaphanous veil softening their strong, handsome features. Their jewellery, too, was notable, for Kashgar produced fine filigree work in silver and gold. With an easy assured air, they advanced into the court of the inn where the Trio were staying, and slipping off their shoes, seated themselves comfortably on the warm *kang* of an inner room. Meanwhile, the face of Mrs. Liu, the Chinese evangelist’s wife, who had accompanied the Trio, was a picture of surprise, for her Chinese propriety was as impeccable as her virtue. Were not these Moslem women rather bold and a bit

free? As they looked on, the Trio were greatly amused. In a letter to friends at home they described the contrast between the Turki and the Chinese. The scene resembled a mannequin parade in a Methodist class-meeting! But as the two women spoke fluent Chinese, Mrs. Liu, keen as ever on her job, was soon chatting with them in a relaxed manner. In the afternoon of the same day two charming children were sent by the Kashgar ladies to escort the Trio on their return call. Here they entered a spacious court, past the watch-dogs, and into a room where the whole family, male and female, from patriarchal head to tiny children, were assembled to greet them.

'You know, I think, that *we* don't use chopsticks,' said one of the Kashgar women as the meal began, and they passed round joints of boiled lamb, served in impeccable Turki style.

It was an enjoyable occasion. 'We sat as to the manner born,' the Trio wrote, 'and gnawed meat from the bone, greatly enjoying our entertainment at this hospitable board.' Then, running true to Cable form, they added: 'We sat for half an hour, while our hosts listened most attentively to the story of the Lord Jesus.'

During the next two weeks, they called at no less than three hundred homes—'rich and poor, high and low', but it was not always so easy as it sounded. Around the oasis were isolated and enclosed farms, outside the town wall. These were a problem. Some of their doors were closed against the Christian women, and dogs were often on guard, so new tactics in communication had to be thought out. With the Chinese helpers, they were a party of eight, so the various districts were divided amongst them for visitation, and a new strategy was put to the test. One person sat down on the roadside outside the gate of a walled farm, and began to read aloud in a foreign tongue, generally English. A few minutes would pass, then the doors would cautiously open. The Trio recorded: 'On not one single occasion were we able to read more than a page without the desired interruption, followed by an invitation to "Come inside".'

Tunhwang itself was cosmopolitan, and in the space of a few days, the Trio were being visited by groups from China, Tibet and Mongolia. 'In the eyes of one old lady,' they wrote, 'our celibacy, our age, and the long, fatiguing journeys we had taken for the sake of our religion marked us out for reverence, not to say, worship!' 'I am too old to get down off this *kang*,' she told them, 'but please come and sit beside me and tell me *how* sin can be wiped out . . . I have kept all my vows and made many pilgrimages. Now tell me what more I can do.'

One evening, when they returned to their inn, they were surprised (and amused) to find fifty men listening wide-eyed to an aged schoolmaster whom they had noticed at some of their open-air meetings. He wore large, horn-rimmed glasses, a long pigtail and a purple-tinted gown of silk. Unseen, they stopped to listen to what he was telling the men: 'I have read all their books,' he was saying, 'and I tell you it is the King of Europe who has sent them here, and it is he who meets all their expenses. Since the war girls are scarce over there, so these people are appointed to select brides for the young men of the King's household.' When the Trio came forward the whole company laughed, realising that the old teacher had been overheard. But the serious Elder Liu soon got to work amongst the crowd to dispel the pretty illusion.

When travellers went to a Gobi oasis, as in all China, they heard a proverb: 'First time raw, second time ripe,' which being interpreted meant that on a first visit strangers were kept at a distance and local knowledge was withheld, but on a second visit, when their character had been assessed, some visitors could be trusted with knowledge of local treasures, while others were fair game for handsome profit. The Trio, however, were familiar with the Chinese language and with many customs and traditions of the people, so that at the Tunhwang fair an old abbot from the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas invited them to visit him. This was the opportunity they had hoped for and many were the visits they paid over the next few years, not only to the Caves in the Tunhwang district but to other interesting areas many miles away, where there were antiquities. It was a long time, however, before they could visit the whole line of the cave-temples, which actually began south of Kanchow and continued along the foothills of the Richtofen range, as far as the borders of the Lob Desert. There was, for example, the 'Horseshoe Temple', where the shrines were connected by a stairway rising to a terrace in the rock face. There, amongst the treasures, was an ancient jewelled saddle and many royal robes with ornate head-dress, belonging to differing periods in China's long civilisation. In the 'Valley of the Myriad Buddhas', some days further west, the Trio afterwards visited frescoed caves dating back to the seventh century, in addition to a hundred and fifty or so more modern shrines. They found the modern carvings much less to their taste than the ancient, and often described them as crude when compared with the dignity of the more historic. The early frescoes on the walls were quite entrancing: 'typical scenes of Olympian delight, where graceful women in flowing draperies stand on light bridges; walk in beautiful gardens,

or look down from terraced walls on the gay pageant below.' All this in a desert of sand! 'When we lighted our candles,' they wrote of another cave, 'we saw that we were in a Gobi art gallery, lined with beautiful carved figures, the reverent work of some great artist of an age gone by.' One carving which particularly impressed them was of a cherub with bowed head and folded wings, whose whole form and attitude carried no suggestion of idolatry. There was no incense-burner before the figure. It stood as a work of art, 'not asking for a place in any pantheon'. Here, surely, they were at the heart of a great epoch of Chinese perception, when vision was clear, the inner eye undimmed by mumbo-jumbo. Could it be, as the anthropologist, Captain Rattray once reported of an Ashanti temple, where no magical symbol was visible within the shrine, that (in the words of the votive priest himself), 'Charms spoil the gods'? Was it as old Thomas à Kempis wrote: 'Simplicity aims at God, purity takes hold of Him'?

In one Hall of Antiquities the Trio were taken round by a local Chinese schoolmaster whose life had been spent in that locality, and who appeared to be a man of unusual culture. His father, grandfather, great-grandfather and generations before these had apparently breathed the same rare air of dedication to the great simplicities of the human spirit. 'He was not a rich man,' they wrote, 'and the meal we ate in his home was necessarily of the simplest, carefully prepared, served unaffectedly, with the knowledge that it was the best that he could offer. At a word from him, his wife opened an old lacquered cupboard, with great brass hinges, and took from it a porcelain dish of the Ming period (A.D. 1368-1644). On the dish she laid a pile of hot, steamed bread, and placed four blue and white saucers around it. On these she served such vegetables as the village produced. For hundreds of years, the man's forbears had been handling these same dishes, but they were neither cracked nor chipped!' As the Three Women ate the scraped carrot from the polished glaze, and sipped with reverence the herb-tea from delicately patterned cups, they were thrilled with the sheer simplicity and beauty of it all. 'We have often tried to visualise,' they wrote, 'the distant happening which had brought the handiwork of famous craftsmen to a hamlet of the Gobi desert—the relics of a bygone glory of civilisation.' Could it have been war or brigandage which had robbed some prince's caravan? Or was it the creeping desert which had engulfed man?

At another cave they met a small farmer. 'From the back of the family bedding he produced a mass of filthy wadded coverings, and

drew out two of the choicest jade bowls that can be imagined,' they wrote. 'The dark one was a feast for the eyes, the paler was a masterpiece, with a delicate, outer trellis standing clear of the chaste translucent cup . . .' Then, when they had looked and gazed and pondered, and looked again, he spread out the ragged cloth, refolded it, and hid the precious things away again, in the recess.

Amongst all the treasures they saw, nothing seems to have equalled the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas in their delight. A twenty miles' tramp through deep gullies from Tunhwang brought one to the world-famous caves, and then on again, not too far away, on the other side of the valley, lay the Lake of the Crescent Moon.

In the sand a trace of moisture grew into a trickle, then into a tiny stream. The Trio followed it for an hour, and it led them to a plantation of young poplar trees. Someone, they were sure, had planted and irrigated those trees. In this desert place someone was fighting the desert, someone cared. And sure enough there in the wood, was a pilgrims' guest-house, and as they approached, out came their friend, old Abbot Wang, who at the Tunhwang Fair had invited them to visit the Caves. They discovered that he had originally come from distant Hupeh Province, and having visited these shrines and found them unkempt and neglected, had decided to devote his remaining years to their care.

In 1908 Sir Aurel Stein, travelling to Tunhwang from India, had unearthed there a collection of ancient manuscripts in a language which no Chinese could read. He had also found rolls of Tibetan paintings, and it was later discovered that some of the manuscripts had been brought from India as early as the seventh century by the Buddhist scholar, Hsüan Chuang. This oasis of Tunhwang, now surrounded by desert, had once been a cultural centre, where people of various faiths seemed to have gathered. There were manuscripts in the Uighur orthography – a language derived from Syriac. Some were in an Iranian dialect of Aramaic (the latter language being the mother-tongue of Jesus of Nazareth); others were in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Asian Brahmi, and Manichæan-Turkish – (Manicheus had been born in Mesopotamia about A.D. 216, and history tells us of his visits to India and China at an early date). The manuscripts had numbered something like nine thousand, and one of them, dating back to A.D. 868, may possibly be the oldest specimen of a known printed book. In addition there were silks in beautiful patterns woven even before the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 221), when

writing had been systematised and printing invented. Twenty-four cases of manuscripts and five boxes of art treasures had been taken across Asia to the British Museum, and the money received by way of payment used to help repair and care for the Caves, and that picturesque plantation in the Desert. The Caves were vast, some of them measuring thirty to thirty-five feet long and twenty to thirty feet wide, and the Three Women revelled in their exploration of them. Outside, on the frontage were row upon row of niches – a sort of gallery – each holding its carved figure. A number of the statues were disintegrating, and were of Buddhist saints and heroes. Some were small metal sculptures, others had evidently been built on a wood or straw foundation and covered with plaster, then painted. Through the rows of caves the Trio traced the life-story of Prince Gautama-Buddha – his childhood, youth and religious search until he became ‘the Enlightened One’ – the light of fifty million Asians. One huge figure of Buddha measured sixty feet by ninety feet, the walls around being covered with carvings, their borders stencilled in red, ochre and bluish green.

‘After the human bustle of Tunhwang Fair,’ the Trio wrote, ‘the silence was absolute. Outside the Cave the day was intensely hot and glaring, inside was a chill gloom and a deathly stillness . . . The unbroken quiet of the place, the remoteness, its great solitude produced an eerie sense that the Caves were guarded by the presence of those who once had worked there – the creative artists. We began to drift into the spirit of this unchanging place to find a strange release from the illusion of passing time.’ One of them unearthed a coin, which may have been dropped there a thousand years before. They handled a string of beads, ‘the ornament of a woman of the Han period’ (202 B.C. – A.D. 221).

Their next excursion was to visit the Lake of the Crescent Moon, which Tunhwang people had told them ‘was more beautiful than words could tell’. ‘We wandered to and fro, looking for some trace of the lake,’ they wrote. ‘At every step we sank up to the ankles in loose, fine sand, but one step more, and there, down at the foot of the hill, as we hoisted ourselves over the last ridge, we saw the lake below us, entrancing, crescent-shaped, sapphire-blue.’ They wrote that it was like ‘a turquoise lying in a fold of opalescent velvet, so deep that its waters were said to be unfathomable’. Eva could not resist a sudden temptation: ‘The downward stretch of soft sand was irresistible. It induced us to *slide* and down we all came in a rush! As we slid, a loud noise came from the depths of the hill, and a strong

vibration seemed to shake the dune, as though the strings of some gigantic musical instrument twanged.'

At the door of a temple, on the green grass by the lakeside, stood the local priest.

'Did you hear the thunder-roll of the hills?' he queried.

They slept in a small guest-house, and at midnight the wind began to whistle over the dunes. Mildred got up, awakened, she thought, by brigands. But no! The priest, too, was awake, and called out: 'Don't be anxious, lady, it's only the drum-roll of the sand-hills, so rest your heart.' But in Mildred's surprise she was not alone, for seven hundred years before Marco Polo had been disbelieved in Venice when he had reported that there were 'rumbling sands in the Gobi Desert'. So the multi-coloured quartz of the desert sands, the green, the red, the purple, the white, glowing with an iridescent sheen, could sing as well! It was all a refreshment of spirit for the travellers.

On their way home, however, they were brought realistically back to the tensions of earth. In a joint letter to their friends, they wrote: 'F.L.F. and A.M.C. were walking, when the mules in the cart in which sat E.F.F. took fright, galloping over the rough sand. The driver was knocked down. Elder Liu was thrown off and left unconscious. First Aid was applied in the house of a butcher, amidst carcasses of meat hanging all round. A fire of thorn bushes and some cups of hot tea worked wonders!'

So with a sense of wonder, after two months in the Gobi, they came back to their home in Suchow. Eva wrote in her diary: 'Ansi, Yümen, Tunhwang were visited again, with the small towns in between. The sale of the Gospels amounted to 86,500 cash, and in each place we had good opportunities for preaching. Farms were visited, and much seed has fallen into well prepared furrows. We received visits from people from all over China, Shansi, Shensi, Szechwan, Hunan, Hupeh, Sining, Peking, Tientsin, and from Kashgar, Turfan, Mongolia, Tibet, Sinkiang and Ili . . .

'Near to the Crescent Moon Lake, a Tibetan lama, tramping his way across China on pilgrimage, came toward us. We greeted him, offering him a copy of the Gospel, and he surprised us by saying that this meeting with us caused him no surprise: "This Jesus about which you speak has appeared to me several times in a dream. I know that I have to believe in Him".'

By 19th November, they had again settled down, with thirty pupils, for a further term of the Bible Training School in Suchow.

By 21st November posters concerning further services were round the city, and they were planning the winter campaign.

22 – HOMEWARD BOUND

As we have seen already, by 1926, the Trio had been in China five years without a break. For the last two years they had been continually 'roughing it' in strenuous travel, and they were beginning to feel the strain. Civil war and brigandage continued, and their letters written to friends at home carry an undertone of finality, as if the time available for missionary work was in a way moving toward some sort of climax, a few years ahead. In Kansu Province, where they lived, the Moslem Tungans were again restive to distant authority, and they were arming. If ever they made common cause with the Moslem Turkis of Sinkiang there would be widespread destruction, and Kansu would become a battlefield.

On 3rd June, 1926 Francesca wrote from Suchow a letter which took two months to arrive in Britain. 'We have had a great deal of coming and going, as is always the case during the spring months, when fairs, theatres and gaieties draw crowds, and we pitch our tent, and form a considerable counter-attraction . . . I hope that letters have got out of China with more regularity than they have come in. Mildred has not yet had a word from her family concerning the illness of her mother, though letters of sympathy from others have come through. The lack of news has been a very great trouble to her, for she fears that her father is watching the post daily for a letter from her with as sinking a heart as she watches here.

'We have reason to fear that fighting has come up alarmingly near to us, and there is a large notice on the City Hall here to say that anyone indulging in idle talk and speculation about military movements will be shot under military law. I do not think we shall be here to see what happens, for in a few days we take our departure and hope to reach England about January 1927. From now until then we shall be travelling very slowly, traversing the wide spaces of Chinese Turkistan and on through Russia, homeward. We shall have several men of the preaching-band with us, and we go ahead, trying to buy up every opportunity that presents itself en route. Our opportunity is as God throws open the door before us . . . We are spending some portion of these last days here in Suchow in feasting! Various people are inviting us out to prolonged food-revelries, which last an unconscionable time.

'Last Sunday was a joyful day. Three women were baptised . . . I hope to drop you a line here and there.'

On 11th June, 1926 they rose at 4 a.m., and to avoid delay took only a cup of tea. They had hoped to start homeward before the heat of the day began, but it was midday before their carts moved off. The way via Shanghai was barred by civil war. The route through Kashgar to the south-west via India was too long and too risky, so they were to travel north-west through Hsing-Hsing-Hsia, Hami, Urumchi in Chinese Turkistan, on to the Russian border; then through to Moscow, Brussels and home. 'We made our way to the North Gate of Suchow,' they wrote, 'and the whole city seemed to be wishing us "*bon voyage*". Deacon Chang with a group of men walked with us, preceded by a cartful of women, escorting us for the first few miles.

'In the shade of a poplar grove three miles from the city stood a tall figure sobbing. It was the Moslem woman who had been the first person to be baptised in Suchow. We had to leave her still weeping by the roadside. Whichever way the missionary moves, some torn root is left bleeding, whether it be when he leaves spiritual children in the land of his adoption, or in parting from parents and friends in the homeland.

'As we said "goodbye", Deacon Chang turned away with tears in his eyes, and we knew that he shrank from the responsibility which now rested upon him. At the time of leaving, hands were extended, beseeching us to stay, but it is only too easy to fall a victim to the illusion that holding together the members of the Church is the work of men, and so to miss the basic fact that its Life-source is the Holy Spirit of God – nor has this power ever been delegated to any human being.'

At Chikinpu, which they described as 'a castellated town', they ran into the rascal who had 'taken them for a ride' on the way to Kinta months before.

'Why, Miss French and Miss Cable!' he exclaimed. 'Who would have thought of seeing you here?'

Turning to his companions, he said: 'These are old friends of mine; you must listen to their preaching. It's all true!'

At Hwahaitz the Trio, after a long stretch of travel, were too tired to eat, and after a cup of tea, they promptly fell asleep. But next day, with their usual resilience, they record: 'The sale of Gospels was most remarkable.'

Yümen was once again 'the gay little town', but this time it had

a new Mandarin, whom they did not know, and outside the *yamen* was a large 'Map of China's Shame', with scarlet patches showing territory that had been seized by foreigners. Here they were told that trouble lay ahead, and they noted that Turki merchants were no longer visible en route.

At Ansi the innkeeper's wife informed them that she had not smoked opium since their last visit. Then they came again to the half buried city of Pulungki, now, they heard, haunted by wolves. Further on, at Santaokow, they noted with satisfaction experiments in afforestation, where, in the planting of trees, man was fighting back against the creeping, paralysing sand. On the next stage came that arduous Black Gobi, where hard marches were necessary, and 'the roads were marked by the bleaching bones of mules and camels'. Now they really were very tired, but three hours later Molly, the mule, gave a loud and cheerful neigh – and there, sure enough, a few blades of grass were visible. Further on, they came to the 'smell of water' and at a small oasis at Petun. They record at this stage: 'Ate, slept, got up, and ate again, then back to bed for the night . . .' When they had rested, they wrote: 'In this small oasis, we visited each family, sat with them and talked. On leaving, we saw that each had some Christian literature as a memento of our visit.'

At a hamlet called Hungliuyuan – 'The Park of Tamarisks' – alkaline deposits lay like a thick crust on the ground and only four people now lived there. Two of the three inns had been abandoned. From Tachuan onward they had the help of a Government Mandarin, who was on his way to take up a new post. He was most gracious, and on occasion he actually slept in his cart in order that the Trio might have a room at an inn. 'Each day, he and his suite joined us at family worship.'

At Hsing-Hsing-Hsia they had at last reached the frontier station between the Province of Kansu and that of Turkistan (or Sinkiang), often spoken of as 'The Valley of Baboons'. They were at the centre of Asia, and here, a thousand troops were billeted, for China's hold on her Turkistan Province was never quite secure. The Trio showed their passports, and were permitted to travel on for two miles through the mountain pass, then they were detained under guard. Their inn-room had only a hole for a window and the room was under the constant inspection of troops. Its *kang* was broken down, a hole in it being stuffed with horse-manure. But there was nowhere else to sleep.

'Your quilt must come a little more to the north,' said a cocky young recruit to them, 'otherwise you will fall down the hole! It's

a tight fit for you, but come a little more to the east, and you'll be all right.'

The courtyard itself was crowded with men and boys, some of whom had festering wounds, which the Trio later learned were due to flogging. They were conscripts, and recruiting was still in progress. Hsing-Hsing-Hsia had a bad name, anyway, and it was an old battlefield.

The Trio were anxious to press on. 'You Westerners are always in a hurry,' remarked the officer to them. 'Stay here for a few days' rest, till I telegraph to the Governor.' But the Trio were determined to keep the initiative. 'We have changed our dresses they told him and we wish to pay our respects to the ladies of your two Commanding Officers in charge of the garrison post.'

So they were permitted to pay their 'duty call' and to one officer's wife they gave a lesson in the Government phonetic script.

'Returning to the inn,' they write, 'we unpacked our travelling harmonium and some books, and held an open-air service. Hymn-sheets were handed round, and soon the choruses were taken up. The sight of the gaily-bound Gospels proved an attraction to the soldiers, and we were overwhelmed with customers . . . After that, we had no more trouble in the inn from inquisitive onlookers. We hung a curtain over the door and no one ventured to lift it.'

The camp turned out to be 'the horror of an inferno', however. Youths were captured for the army and held there; travellers were detained, some were forced to serve. From early dawn till dark men gambled, loafed about, fought and cursed their fate, young boys and men together. A spirit of black hopelessness dominated the place. No one dared to escape because all round was desert – no water for miles – and many deaths had occurred of travellers attempting to cross the frontier without passing through the camp. One day, six riderless mules had been captured. 'The Chinese,' they wrote, 'are a long-suffering people. They bear the tyrannies of their oppressors with pathetic resignation, but the hour is at hand when they will rise and avenge the wrong of generations.'

Wherever the Trio moved they seemed to make an impact. Even of that 'inferno' where men gathered or were trapped to form a new army, and cursed and fought together, the women could write: 'There were great lamentations in the garrison when the men saw us preparing to leave. The gambling tables were abandoned as the crowd gathered to say "goodbye" and to wish us "good luck".' As the Trio left an orderly appeared with a present of fresh vegetables

from the officer's wife, and Francesca remarked: 'Influence is a wonderful power. I suppose none of us realises the extent to which we influence other people.'

Permission had now been granted, and as they travelled they fell in with a party of Tibetan lamas, and they, too, had been waiting for passports. On they moved, over the blue, purple, green and grey stretches of rocky road, toward Hami, the historic capital of the 'King of the Gobi'. The lamas were impressed when, in starting their own journey by burning incense and prostrating themselves, they learned that the Trio burned no incense. 'We were the only travellers on that road who would dare to take such a journey without observing this rite,' wrote the women. But one of their carters was something of an exhibitionist. Two months before he would have been as superstitious as the lamas themselves, but now, as he set out with the Trio he boasted: 'Of course, *we* never start on a day's journey without first asking the blessing of God.'

Impact and influence were not all one way. Over the years the Desert Road had affected the Trio. They wrote: 'The space, the silence, the darkness, the loneliness—all produced a state of consciousness in which the accepted values of life seemed readjusted; found to be curiously different from those in the busy throng . . . We have remained wiser women for the meditation of those Gobi nights.' On another occasion they said: 'Silence settles on the whole party. The mules know their business, the carters, dumb as their team, tramp in the starlight, with sure feet. The traveller, if his line of communication with God be open, sits in a rapt sense of the Divine which checks self-expression, and commands the tense stillness of utmost reverence. The spirit takes control of the self-expressive soul . . . The desert has caught you, and you, the so-called teacher of men, shall be taught . . . Man-made constructions never again look so imposing.'

At Hwanglukang — 'The Hill of Yellow Reeds' — a restful spot, the country changed from desert to shady trees, where fresh vegetables were available. They wandered round leisurely to see the local mosque, for now they were in country which was solidly Mohammedan. Chinese were in a minority. 'We found the venerable Ahung, courteous, dignified, friendly, surrounded by a group of little boys, to whom he was teaching the Koran — the sons of Turki families.' Inn-keepers, however, were still mostly Chinese.

Then suddenly, in a small Russian cart, there appeared on the road a tall, blue-eyed, bearded European, dressed in clean, coarse,

white Turki cotton. He dismounted, raised his hat; shyly, he half-bowed to the three women. It was George Hunter of Urumchi, who had made a three weeks' journey to meet them. He was the nearest missionary neighbour to Suchow, but with a distance of six weeks between the two cities. There was a short silence, a little hesitancy, then came the warmth of their deep gratitude. 'His eyes expressed simplicity and candour,' they wrote. 'His hair and beard were white, his presence benign and dignified.' This man, who hailed from the Scottish highlands, had made his way to Central Asia twenty-five years before, and had lived there ever since. He travelled great distances between Siberia, Hami, Turfan, and even Kashgar. He was a bachelor. 'We stood talking for a few moments,' they wrote, 'then with old-world courtesy he bowed us back to our cart and disappeared under the awning of his own wagon, urging us now to take some rest, saying he would call on us again in the late afternoon . . .'

And so to distant Hami, where, they wrote, 'the beauties exceeded all our expectations . . .' and where 'an armful of much accumulated mail awaited us.' At last, when they had read their mail and rested, they ended their day 'with a hot bath—the first since leaving Suchow!'

Hami is in 'Chinese Turkistan', or Sinkiang Province, which is also sometimes spoken of as the 'New Dominion'. It was so called by the Chinese as long ago as 1759, when it actually became a Chinese colony. In this Province, the largest in China and furthest from Peking, her frontiers meet those of Russia. Sinkiang embraces the deserts of Lob, Gobi and Takla Makam, and has both mountains and deep depressions. One peak stands two thousand feet high, yet only a hundred miles away, in the Turfan depression, the land is nearly one thousand feet below sea-level — one of the hottest spots on earth.

A Chinese proverb described the journey from Suchow to Hami as 'unmitigated bitterness'; but when one got there the fruits were famous: melons, Turfan grapes, Chinese dates, apples and pears; and on its steppes grazed herds of sheep, cattle, horses and camels. To the south-west of Sinkiang lay the distant Himalayan and Tibetan mountain ranges; in the north-east, the Altai and sands of Mongolia; due west, the Russian border. Eighty per cent of the population was Moslem and of Turki descent — five per cent only being of the ruling Chinese stock. For centuries the territory had been a battle-field, with final conquest by China.

The Province is twice the size of France, but from a missionary angle, apart from a fine Swedish Christian mission, with schools, orphanages and medical work situated far away to the south-west in Kashgar, for many years there were only two missionaries in the whole of this immense region. Their station, at Urumchi, was a thousand miles from Kashgar, and eight hundred miles from Suchow. The isolation implied by such distances can be imagined when it is remembered that the quickest mode of transport was on horseback. By cart the speed at most was thirty miles a day.

One of the younger workers in that distant Swedish mission at Kashgar and a contemporary of the Trio was Rachel Orde Wingate, coming from Indian Army stock, whose brother was Brigadier Wingate of the Burma Chindits in the last war. Studying Arabic and Persian at Cambridge, she had taken the Oriental Tripos and the Historical Tripos before joining the Swedish mission in 1924. Years later she collaborated with Sir Denison Ross in preparing a Turki-English dictionary. Distances, however, were so great that the Trio did not meet Miss Wingate for many years, and then it was in London!

Across the eastern section of that vast desert the Trio had now travelled, mile after mile and night after night. From vivid passages in their books we get a glimpse – a sort of bird's-eye view – of the desert at night. As darkness falls the desert quickens into life and scorching heat gives way to sudden chill. Widely separated caravans emerge from oasis inns, to move slowly forward. Long trains of up to two hundred camels, roped together in strings of twelve, stretch in thin line over the narrow tracks; groups of large carts, each with a thousand pounds of merchandise, follow one another – miles apart – across the plain; oddly assorted groups of pedestrians carry their baggage, balanced over shoulders on long poles . . . Then, as by a hidden signal, halfway through the night, the travellers briefly halt. Caravans moving in opposite directions meet and greet each other. Carters recognise friends; pedestrians lay down their loads to rest aching shoulders and weary limbs. But desert talk is spare, subdued, unhurried, for open spaces teach men to be sharers, not so much of words, but of dignity and silence. Quietly they rest, scorning noise and tattle, for their world of sand deadens the sound of noisy wheels; the padded feet of camels move quietly over the dunes, and even the sonorous monotone of the camel-bell becomes a deep, dull boom. Then, the halt ended, on again the travellers go . . . So at night, the desert comes alive – humans, innumerable

small animals, insects, emerge from their hiding places, and through the dark, cool hours these living things move ceaselessly, silently and invisibly over the earth. Nearer to man's oasis-settlement, slinking silhouettes of wolves or evil men wait for the lonely pedestrian . . . Across the dry expanse the sky offers a back-cloth of brilliant stars, hanging clear, suspended, never creating the illusion of twinkling light. 'Not illumination but rather a transparency of air,' wrote Lawrence of Arabia of his own desert . . . And then at last, night itself slowly steals away, the sun appears, and camels kneel to have their burdens unloaded; mules stand patiently, weary for drink and fodder; oasis inns open their dusty doors to tired wayfarers who have covered another thirty miles of desert through the night . . .

Though our Trio had come to Hami and had still three weeks' travel ahead to arrive at Urumchi, they were now three weeks west of Suchow — *nearer Home*.

23 — PARADISE IN A CHINESE COLONY

WHEN they were in the mood, the Trio were rather given to superlatives, and after their desert trek, old Hami appeared to them to be almost a paradise — the 'largest and most fertile oasis' they had ever seen anywhere. For six miles before reaching the town they travelled through cultivated land, watered by the melting of distant snows, which glistened in the sunshine. To complete the idyllic beauty for these three weary women, a group of girls in scarlet frocks and flowing white veils came running down the road, driving a herd of unruly donkeys, and after the dreary desert, all their lives they never forgot the riot of colour in this Hami oasis, which covered thirty-five square miles. It was such a change. 'The beauties of Hami exceeded all our expectations . . . The inn was newly built and equipped, we had our own kitchen, and to cap everything, the landlord sent us ripe melons into our rooms!' One suspects that behind this warm reception was the sympathetic heart and hand of that silent Scot, George Hunter.

Like St. Paul, they not only knew how to be in want, but also how to abound — when the means were available and they felt them to be permissible. In the record of their arrival at Hami they go into some detail about their first meal. One hour after arrival, they sat down to:

Rice, with Shantow bread.

Chopped Mutton, with fried aubergines.

French beans, sautés au mouton.

Sliced cucumber

Cantaloupe

Tea, made with sweet (not brackish) water.

In reading through their letters at this time one gets a feeling that in addition to the welcome armful of long-awaited home-mail and the possibility of relaxation after the strain of travel, with a plentiful supply of hot water, the presence of Mr. Hunter to 'take charge of them' was an important ingredient in their enjoyment.

The Hami oasis was divided into three townships. The first was centred on the Palace of the Khan, 'The King of the Gobi', and a descendant of the thirteenth century Genghis Khan, to whose memories Moslem Turkis were loyal. The second was the walled town where lived the governing Chinese garrison and Magistrate. In between the two, was the thickly-populated Moslem-Turki city. Passengers though they were, the Trio soon got to work inside the harem of the Moslem landlord of the inn – 'to call on his ladies!' they said. They write of 'the beauty of those tall, dark handsome creatures, whose drapery afforded full play for coquettish and tantalising concealment!' Many centuries before Marco Polo had described this same place somewhat differently: 'The shameful city of Camul,' he had called it!

The terraced hillsides, the town parks and streams, the flowers and fruits, amply justified, they felt, the description given of Hami by some of their Chinese friends in Suchow, 'an earthly paradise'. In the bazaars and streets they saw men from almost every part of Central Asia: money-changers, copper-smiths, travelling pedlars, and riveters of broken china. Different races had different tastes in dress and furnishings: silk and fine cotton for Chinese, barbaric striped cottons, carpets and rugs for Turkis. Concerning the produce from the gardens and farms, the Trio went into ecstasies: 'Juicy green peppers as large as oranges, water-melons of enormous size, carrots, egg-plants, lettuce, celery, onions.' One pod of French beans was over a foot long, and they found that bags of broad beans were even used as fodder for the animals! . . .

But men do not live by bread alone, so the Three Women were soon down to real business. 'One day we took a consignment of Arabic Gospels, and with our Chinese evangelist and the cart went into the city.' In the women's quarters of some houses they found several wives, typical of Moslem civilisation, but the trade in Christian literature became so brisk that soon they had sold out.

When the word had got around they became the centre also of an excited crowd of lads, pressing in and wanting to buy. 'So poor old Molly, the mule, had to do a double-quick canter to get us out.'

Next day it was the turn of the Chinese quarter—the walled city—but here the approach was different. The Chinese being a race of shop-keepers, the psychological approach was along the line of trade, and the Trio proceeded to buy silks and face-towels. As they turned over the silks, 'looking out for uneven threads', the Chinese, whose admiration for this discrimination was slowly rising, muttered to each other, 'They know all about everything.' This opinion was reinforced when the Trio offered only half the price written on the tag! In their circular letters there is a priceless description of this scene: 'While the courteous merchant was writing out the account, we rapidly noted the amount in pencil on a piece of paper, and waited to see if his account balanced with ours. "Did you see that?" said a man to the merchant. "You will find that they are right. Reading, writing and arithmetic are all quite easy to them".' . . . As they rose to leave and the merchant with great respect escorted them to their cart, they handed him a packet of Christian books, 'which he accepted with evident pleasure'.

Each day brought them visitors of interest, including the son of the Khan himself, who came to talk to them on religious matters on several occasions. In argument with local Moslems they repeatedly met the Mahommedan belief that 'Jesus Christ will come to rule the earth in righteousness'—for to the Moslem, Jesus is a Prophet, and is still living.

Hami was sometimes called Kamul, or as Marco Polo called it, Camul. The Kalmuks—also inhabitants of this region—abandoned Buddhism for Islam centuries ago, even though the Chinese, who were still not Moslem, governed the territory. The Trio did not hesitate to give their opinion on the regime: 'We were much impressed by the capacity of the Chinese for colonisation, for though they were the conquerors of Turkistan . . . they showed a great aptitude for accustoming themselves to the conditions of life in a new country, and though living in easy intercourse with the Turki people, which is a virile race, they retained their own customs and traditions with remarkable tenacity.' How truly the Trio spoke. Hongkong, for instance, was once a small fishing island, Shanghai a swampy estuary, Singapore a mud-flat—all built-up to serve the Westerner. Today, they are peopled by millions of Chinese, who retain their own traditions and are a people apart: tireless, intelligent,

disciplined, patient. They are amongst the richest capitalists and the most enthusiastic Communists in East and South-East Asia. Over the years they absorbed their Manchu conquerors; today, they are the most numerous and the most prolific race under the sun. Their culture extends to the Japanese language, to Vietnamese and to Korean; their art and craftsmanship are second to none; their tenacity phenomenal . . . The insight of the Trio on Chinese character forty years ago still stands. Today, Item No. One on the agenda of every Asian country – not excluding Soviet Russia – is ‘China and the Chinese’.

Sinkiang had been penetrated by Chinese population before the Christian era, at the time of the Han Dynasty, but continuously over the centuries their hold on it had been challenged. Much of its surface was desert, only two per cent of the land being oasis-region; but it was of great strategic importance, for its frontiers, even today, are contiguous with those of Russia, Tibet, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Centuries ago, it was a cockpit where China endeavoured to forestall barbarian attacks from Western Asia and at the same time to secure the trade routes to Europe along the Old Silk Road. Over the years it had become more ‘Turki-fied’ by peoples of Iranian origin, and even in more recent history has been the scene of intrigue from both outside and inside, and, as we shall see later, finally of open revolt. At one time and another China has lost control of Tibet, Mongolia, and Manchuria, while Sinkiang itself has been a point of irritation between Russia and China. Today, China still negotiates her Sinkiang frontiers with Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, but meanwhile Siberian frontiers still hold. In her colonisation of Tibet she counts on Sinkiang as the base of her operations.

At the time the Trio passed through the Province, armies of revolt were already gathering in Urumchi for action against the Central Chinese Government, which all the time was infiltrating Chinese peasants into lands owned by Turki people, so that China could retain her grip on this territory. And back in Kansu Province (which our Trio had just left) a year later, in 1927, a young Moslem Tungan, Ma Chung Ying, a boy of seventeen, was heading a rising against taxes levied by the Chinese War Lord, General Feng. A few years later Ma Chung Ying marched into Sinkiang to join the Moslem Turkis, and, as we shall later see, our Trio became personally involved in the episode, and on their return from Europe they were actually taken prisoner.

Such were the gathering discontents, cross-currents and intrigues as the Three Women wended their way from Suchow to Urumchi

in August 1926, with Russian and Chinese forces working underground, and the teenager General Ma Chung Ying and his army becoming an increasing menace in the Kansu situation.

The journey from Hami to Urumchi was another five hundred miles, but finally their party arrived. Urumchi was well supplied with water and coal, and drew many of its manufactured goods from Russia, for it was forty-five days' journey from Peking. Letters could reach London in twenty-eight days – across Russia. There was a Russian Consul-General and a Russian Orthodox Church, but permission to erect a statue to Lenin had been refused by the Chinese authorities. Mongolians, Tibetans, Qazaqs and Tungans, the women noted, were splendid horse-riders, the Russians and Siberians using tall, elegant horses in contrast with the sturdy Mongol ponies and the half-tamed steeds of the Tungans.

The Chinese are a courteous and cultured people, and wherever the Trio went they were graciously received by them, though in the unsettled state of the Province the Chinese Governor of Urumchi was autocratic, and no newspaper could be published. Within the restaurants were posters, 'No political discussion allowed'. The Trio were the first British women to visit Urumchi, and they stayed in the China Inland Mission with Mr. Hunter and his colleague for several weeks, resting, working, and making arrangements for the final stages of their homeward journey.

With Hunter lived Percy Mather, from Fleetwood in Lancashire. They were a good team. Hunter had a rough and ready working knowledge of half a dozen Central Asian languages. Mather was a scholar, and having already completed a Mongolian dictionary he was now working on a Manchurian-Russian grammar and dictionary. He had learned Mongolian through Chinese, but to do so, he had visited the local prison for months, sitting day after day behind bars with a Mongolian prisoner who could speak Chinese, which Mather knew. Meanwhile, George Hunter had cyclostyled draft copies of the Gospels in Turki, to be followed by a translation of the *Pilgrim's Progress* in the same language – and some of the Scriptures in Qazaq. He had already been distributing Scripture in the Manchurian version, on which George Borrow had worked a hundred years before . . .

Years later, Mildred and Francesca were jointly to write the biographies of both these remarkable men. Concerning Hunter, they recorded: 'In his young days he had loved a woman with all the

intense devotion of which his Scottish heart was capable. The day came when she died at the age of twenty-two, and at her request the New Testament which he had given her and all the letters he had written to her were placed in her grave . . . Thus, George Hunter was left desolate and alone . . . It was then that he dedicated himself to missionary work.'

Years later still, when the political situation in Asia became acute, and the Moslem revolt under General Ma threatened Chinese rule in Sinkiang, Hunter himself was put in prison in Lanchow. He was released in 1946, then a man of eighty-three years of age, having lived in China fifty years with only one furlough. He was never again to arrive back in his beloved Urumchi, for after being cared for by the Church at Kanchow, he died, and was buried there. A Chinese wrote of Hunter: 'I used to find him sitting by a desk before an open window, with an open Bible before him . . . I often wondered why he should have left modern civilisation to go to such a barbarous place for the rest of his life . . . Without Christianity, no man could have stood such hardship and so lonely a life.'

Sometimes, in his solitude, this tough missionary would feel like writing verse. Then he would write of the Call of the 'Wild, Wild Gobi'.

*Dear friend, if you will read this lay and come along with me today,
I'll take you very far away, to view the wild, wild Gobi:
The lovely hart and pleasant roe in thousands wander to and fro
This is their desert home, you know, it is the wild, wild Gobi.*

*Large tracts of land are scorched and dry, of water there's but scant supply,
And walled around by mountains high, it lies, this black, wild Gobi:
But where the deep, pure river flows, the desert blossoms as the rose,
And rich and green the country grows, e'en in this black, wild Gobi.*

*But were this all that could be said, with ease I'd sleep upon my bed,
I'd snugly pillow down my head, nor think of wild, wild Gobi:
But sad the news I've got to say, for thousands here are far astray,
And guides are few to show the Way, in this dark, wild Gobi.*

*The harvest's good, the reapers few, but ask what He would have you do,
And to His sacred trust be true, regarding wild, wild Gobi:
For His Name's sake some hardship bear, to break His last command,
beware,
Go, preach the Gospel everywhere, e'en in the wild, wild Gobi.*

'The weeks of our stay at Urumchi were very happy and interest-

ing, and the time passed only too quickly,' wrote the Trio. Doubtless with the much travelled George Hunter they 'talked shop' for most of the time, for he had little interest in anything else. For the younger, more sensitive Percy Mather, who had not set eyes on an English woman for twelve of his sixteen years in China, the fellowship was most welcome. Mather had been working desperately hard, perhaps over-working, and was not so physically solid as Hunter. For this reason it had been decided that he should return to Britain for leave, and it was with pleasure that the Trio looked forward to his company as they continued their way home. A long Russian four-wheeled springless *tarantass* was acquired, for they had still seven hundred miles of Sinkiang territory to cover before they reached the Russian border.

On 26th August, 1926 they left Urumchi, the Governor of the Province sending them tinned food for the journey, and other friends were so generous that they could not carry all with them. Their Chinese helpers who had accompanied them from Suchow were now to return home, and Molly the mule to remain as a 'guest' of Mr. Hunter. With the *tarantass* and the stronger horses they could now cover six miles an hour instead of three, so the journey to the Russian border at Chuguchak took them only two weeks, for roads were good. Mather rode on his horse, the ladies travelled in the cart. As they drew nearer to the border traffic increased, for in the first day out they had counted only twelve carts going in the opposite direction.

En route, the population being almost solidly Moslem, the Trio found the lot of women, whom they visited in various harems, a far from easy one. For men divorce was easy. Mildred writes: 'The tragedy of Moslem women offers a great opportunity for service from Christian women.'

The new driver of their cart was a dour Turki. He had a large bag hung near him on the shafts of the cart, and into this he put all the articles acquired en route, even to the sweepings of the fodder from the animal troughs each morning: so the Trio called him 'Sandy MacNab'. Turning their horses out to graze, the party sometimes slept on the open steppes, scouring around for sun-dried cow-dung to make a fire to cook an evening meal. If they passed a wooded stream, they took the opportunity for a dip and a 'good wash'.

As they neared the Russian frontier they stopped to look back over China's most westerly landscape. Silently they stood, with deep emotion, in gratitude to God for many mercies—and in hope for their return.

So for the first time they entered Russian Siberia, reminding Eva of Geneva days. Surprisingly, they found here the 'pleasantest customs inspection' they had ever had. On they went again, spending the first night at a Qazaq encampment, where through the long evening they sat cross-legged around a cow-dung fire, over which hung a large saucepan from which tea was ladled to visitors who slipped in and out. At bedtime they congratulated themselves that during the evening they had lost only a few things taken from their baggage while they were tea-drinking, the chief of which was a frying-pan – later discovered under one of the family's beds!

Steaming down a river for two days they wrote: 'We divested ourselves of Chinese dress and walked out in home-made skirts and jumpers; over our heads we tied kerchiefs.' On the steamer, they were charmed to see once more an electric light in a well lit cabin. 'It stood to us,' they said, 'for all the amenities of Western life.' There were other evidences which showed that they were moving westward. People were anxious to know what they thought of the policy of the Labour Party and of Ramsay MacDonald, whose name was a household word amongst folk who had sent money to help unemployed miners in Britain. On board the river steamer they found a piano, and the whole saloon clapped with joy when they heard for the first time 'Onward Christian Soldiers'!

They arrived at Omsk on a Saturday, and on the following day were greatly impressed by the singing of the crowded congregation in the Orthodox Church. But in the city itself, following the 1917 Revolution and in this most eastern province of Russia, food was still rationed, hotels were poor. There were long waits at the Post Office, and trains were crowded. Lenin had died two years previously – an event followed by indecision and strife between Stalin and Trotsky. A few months later the first Russian Five Year Plan was launched.

And so, through deep Siberian forests, whose foliage was changing colour in the autumn air . . . on to Moscow. In common with thousands of others they queued outside the Mausoleum in Red Square to see the embalmed remains of Lenin. What were Eva's thoughts at that moment? He, too, had lived in Geneva, years before. 'The scene was startling,' they wrote. 'Across the Square stretched a dense line of men, women and children, moving silently and in perfect order.' With the crowd the Trio entered the Mausoleum, and in the centre, guarded by a motionless armed guard, stood the glass coffin containing the body of a man, with hand clenched. They wrote: 'The features of Lenin are familiar to the world. . . the forehead that of a thinker, the brow showing power, concentration

and strength of will . . .' But they could not resist projecting the scene to world proportions. The scarlet room, the silent, patient, obedient crowd, those armed watchers – and that corpse of wax . . . Did it sum up a world policy? Was it a parable?

On 5th October, 1926, they reached Brussels – quite nervous about their appearance! They replaced the kerchiefs with hats, their sandals with shoes, and in new frocks they felt less conspicuous. These middle-aged Britishers, so unself-conscious in the Gobi, so willing to 'go out in the midday sun' when they were abroad, were scared of being 'non-conformist' in attire amongst their own people! To find this lasting trait in Mildred the bold, and Eva the imp, comes as a surprise. In Francesca, the ever 'dainty', it was understandable.

Their arrival in London was, however, typical, for it was completely unexpected. No one knew they were coming and hotels were pretty full. After five years in China they felt a bit lost, so they trudged around the 'bed and breakfast' accommodation available in the vicinity of Victoria station. They knocked at a door, the landlady looked them over, and then listened patiently to their doubts about the prices she was asking for her rooms. Finally she capitulated: 'See 'ere, beds for six shillings a 'ead, and in the morning I'll throw in a cup of tea.'

They had travelled for four months and had covered six thousand miles from Suchow to London – and the pot of tea settled the argument.

BANDITS, BRIGANDS AND CIVIL WAR

24—IMAGE AND IMPACT

THE Trio came home to many familiar faces. They also came home to discover gaps in their family circles, after this further five years abroad . . .

As soon as it became known that they were in England invitations to speak at meetings began to multiply. They already had a fairly large following in the evangelical circle of the China Inland Mission, and they had retained their membership at Westminster Chapel, whose congregation had helped in their work. For some years, too, they had been sending circular letters to a collection of friends, whose number had been growing ever since the Boxer Rising of 1900, when Eva French had been mistakenly reported as having been murdered.

In 1917 Mildred and Francesca had published a book entitled *The Fulfilment of a Dream*, describing their work amongst women and girls in Shansi. Then in 1923 had come their dramatic decision to depart from established institutional work for the wide open spaces in Central Asia. This down-to-earth realism with regard to the spread of the Gospel in untouched strategic centres had amazed some of their older friends, fascinated younger admirers, and had intrigued many who were only on the fringe of what were called 'missionary circles'. Articles in various magazines, and news items about their travels, had begun to interest certain learned Societies in London and Edinburgh. Moreover, China itself was continually in the news, for the travels of the Trio had taken place in a country where nationalism was rising, civil war widespread, and brigandage common. Even while they were at home during 1926-7, the 'Shanghai Incident' took place, when Chinese students were fired on by British, French and other European troops defending the International Settlement. The result of all this interest was that when the three women toured England, Scotland or Ireland, they addressed crowded meetings.

During this same leave Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton became their publishers—a happy partnership which was to cover some twenty years and as many books. Mr. Paul Hodder-Williams and

Mr. Leonard Cutts of the firm became personal friends, as they were admirers of these remarkable people, whose next production *Through Jade Gate and Central Asia*—a book of some three hundred pages—ran to twelve impressions.

From all this it is evident that a sort of 'image' of our Trio as pioneer venturers—to some, rather dare-devil adventurers—was building up among the British people, who always warm to individuals, however 'mad', who take risks without too much fuss. To Christian people—particularly the older 'stay-at-homes'—their story was now a tonic, and to crowds of younger folk it was a challenge to world service—scores of them in response actually offered for overseas service during the next ten or so years.

As they boarded the train in London on the 22nd March, 1928, to return to China, the three women were looking fit, plump and well clad. Evidently their leave had done them good. Eva was fifty-nine years of age, Francesca fifty-seven, and Mildred fifty. As usual, they had numerous packages scattered round them. Each wore a fashionable hat of the cloche shape, two sported fur collars and cuffs to their coats, Eva wore a cardigan. Mildred displayed light-coloured stockings, the other two, black. All carried broad photographic smiles, and it was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society who had posed them for a picture!

The Trio reached Shanghai on the 25th August, 1928. General Feng now had his military headquarters in Hankow, and Dr. Kao, was in charge of the military hospital there. He had brought with him a whole band of Suchow Bible students, who were doing Red Cross work in the hospital. It was with eagerness and excitement that these Suchow students gathered up the many packages of the Trio and helped them on their way . . .

When they arrived home at Suchow after an absence of eighteen months they found that the mission compound had gained a reputation as a refuge for starving children. During the very severe winter little naked beggars had been fed daily with hot porridge, and Elder Liu had turned a barn into a shelter. 'The underworld of Chinese beggar life is a jungle,' they wrote; but they were happy to find that a band of Christian young men was patrolling the streets each evening to pick up little waifs and strays whom the adult beggar-gang had thrown out from the more sheltered places. Several small children had become temporary members of the household, and, as we have already recorded, one of them became a permanent member: 'Little Lonely', the deaf and dumb girl Topsy. It was Christmas Eve, 1928.

Once again the caravan of the Three Women became a familiar sight to scores of innkeepers, while their meeting-tent was known to thousands of oasis dwellers, as to many a lonely pilgrim and trader from places as far apart as Lhasa and Urga, Kashgar, and Kalgan. These women were feared by none because they were women and because their devotion to God impressed Asian peoples, who respected religion in all its forms.

On 16th July, 1929, they began what turned out to be one of the longest journeys of their career. It lasted over a year, and they once more travelled to distant Sinkiang with Chinese evangelists—Topsy accompanying them.

What impact, we wonder, did our Trio make on the Gobi people? In early Christianity, even before the Gospels were written, men spoke of the 'Spirit of Jesus' as something they had seen and felt. What had the Gobi people seen in our Trio? we may ask.

'Jesus had a genius for friendliness and in turn, the love and kindness of His friends upheld Him. There was belief in Him and in His ideas. Faces would soften when He came. No other teacher dreamed that common men could possess a tenth part of the moral grandeur and spiritual power which He elicited from simple and commonplace men—chiefly by believing in them.* For Him, the presence of God was rooted in the ordinary everyday things: a simple home, where there was an atmosphere of love and a seeking for truth, a meal, a wheatfield, a fisherman's boat, a carpenter's bench, a storm on the lake, a mountain-side, a desert place or a garden. 'The Kingdom of God is within you,' He told the people. It was all so new, so revolutionary, so fresh and so refreshing. As in a mirror, the look on the faces of His immediate followers passed this on, consciously in their preaching and unconsciously in their lives, which He had transformed, quickened and redeemed . . . It was something they had caught—something of the power of His own life.

And what then did the Gobi people see in our Trio? To find out, we look for jottings in their journals:

Friendly faces

We are constantly meeting with evidence of the interest which is aroused by the preaching and teaching which is given . . .

A peasant in a long blue gown alighted from a donkey and greeted us with a profound salutation: 'Peace be to you, Teachers,' he said . . .

* T. R. Glover, *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, Methuen.

A couple of travellers appeared at a familiar inn. 'What a pleasure to see a familiar face,' they said . . .

'Do you remember me?' said the young soldier. 'I was one of the youngsters at your children's service in Suchow . . .'

In this town our friendly inn is owned by a Turki Muslim. His face radiates kindness. We arrived at his door in the early morning. His rooms were at once placed at our disposal, while his boys were set to empty a villainous pool of dirty water on the threshold of our bedroom door . . .

Last time we passed through here, our reception was wholly antagonistic, but this time things were different. The chief of the Mosque asked us to his house . . .

Two days after our return from one of our journeys a welcoming crowd occupied every available inch of the tent and outer court . . .

This is our fourth visit to this Pass. The tent is more crowded than ever . . .

With our two mules in the shafts drawing our 'Gobi Express', we became a familiar sight . . .

All day long

All day long, until evening, crowds listened to the story of the love of God and His provision for salvation from sin. Sales of Gospels surpassed all previous experience—not a cart left without one . . .

We sat cross-legged in this Christian household. After supper, the family, the shepherd boys, the labourers, all gathered for family prayers. We sang 'Onward Christian Soldiers' to the accompaniment of our small organ . . .

At Kinta we met many old friends, notably one who always invites us to tea. We tried to earn our supper by attempting to do some weeding, in separating the true wheat from the false; but we were blundering—the two plants are so much alike. In future, we give ourselves to *sowing* . . . Here the kind farmer's kitchen, grinding-stone and firewood were all placed at our disposal. At nightfall, we slipped down quietly to the river and plunged in . . .

The Suchow Church

The mission compound has gained the reputation in Suchow of being a refuge for starving children. Little naked beggars have been fed daily . . . The resources of the small Christian community in Suchow are now taxed to the full . . . a daily tent meeting, visiting, callers, evangelical excursions. We consult the church leaders as to which direction would be possible for our next tour . . .

They fell among thieves

Our possessions are few, but very valuable to us, and in this place the proximity of thieves caused us a moment's tremor. However, they proved the most honourable neighbours . . . At the close of the Fair, we parted with them on the best of terms, and shall probably meet them later in the season. They, like us, follow the crowds. We told the bandits that we always had family prayers, and they said they would like to join us . . .

Bandits shouted to us: 'Stop, what carts are those?'

'Why, it's the Suchow missionaries!' they said, and departed . . .

The seekers

We had not expected to find friends here, but a smiling young woman caught our hands and reminded us of our meeting in Barkul thirteen days' journey distant . . .

Taoist priests approached us. The talk went on till the moon rose. One confessed his determination to cease posing as a guide to others until he himself had found the Way . . . From the moment of entering the Gate we were surrounded by crowds of friendly people, and within a few hours we were realising that the Seed sown five years ago had germinated . . .

A Central Asian merchant and his young wife were the first to be baptised that morning. He was converted at the time of our visit. He carried on an extensive business throughout the Gobi . . . He spoke of the persistent pressure of the Spirit upon him . . .

'Why do you leave in such a hurry?' asked a Levite of the Mosque . . . Truly, our hearts ached when we saw the multitude . . .

By this shall all men know

She was deaf, but in her heart she wondered why these people were

so different from everyone else in the town and why they never turned her away. They kept no fierce dogs to keep people out. . . . Take her to the Christians, the crowd said. They will look after her . . .

Almost hourly, fresh parties poured into the town, and the court, of which we were paying the rent, was occupied by a hundred people, all claiming hospitality . . . 'So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth and the seed should grow and spring up, he knoweth not how'

Heady stuff from Moscow

Among our acquaintances was the Russian wife of a Chinese city Magistrate. She spoke both Turki and Chinese with brilliance She opened a bottle of Russian champagne in our honour, passing it off as a special fruit drink! The Puritan member of our party, never having tasted champagne, was only made aware of a lapse from grace by the mischievous look in her comrade's eye. The smart one of the Trio emptied her glass and accepted more before the label on the bottle came into sight! . . .

The Hand of God

Without a guide at that particular moment, we knew not where to go and were literally at our wit's end. Two of us slipped away and asked God that if we were to move from the Bandits, as seemed indicated, that a guide should be sent to lead us Within ten minutes a man, mounted a a small donkey, rode up and entered into conversation with us. He offered to take us by back ways to the Turkistan frontier. It was already evening, and only by the good hand of God upon us did our cart-wheels remain intact while we ploughed through deep water-channels. Our wheels sank in the mire, if they stood for a moment, and were buried up to the axles in treacherous sand We desire to express our profound consciousness of the canopy of prayer spread over defenceless heads by your faithful remembrances of us

We chose this farm where we knew we should be among friends, having stayed there three years previously It was cheering to find how well the women remembered what we had told them last time of the Gospel story

In her moving book, *Waiting on God*,* the remarkable Simone

* Collins.

Weil wrote: 'Our true dignity . . . consists in this, that . . . we no longer live in ourselves, but Christ lives in us; so that through our perfection, Christ in His integrity and in His indivisible unity, *becomes* in a sense, each one of us, as He is completely in each host.'

25—THE WINDS OF CHANGE BECOME A BREATH OF FURY

THE Trio were back in Suchow when news came of a rising in distant Sinkiang of the Turki population against the Chinese authorities. It appeared that when the Old Khan died, to whom the Moslem Turki people were loyal, the Chinese Government dethroned the heir—the 'Prince of Gobi'—and attempted to strengthen their grip on the territory by appointing new Magistrates, tax-collectors, and other officials. When, after that, an 'infidel', 'pig-eating', Chinese clerk had taken a Turki girl by force, the population rose as one man to fight the local Chinese administration.

When this news reached distant Suchow the Women wrote: 'Suddenly the breath of fury arose and Sinkiang was in revolt.'

In Kansu, where they lived, the next happening was the approach of forces of the young General Ma, already under arms, nearer to Suchow. 'Shots were fired in the night, dogs barked, there was a loud knock at the door, and we were wide awake,' they wrote. 'In came a band of young wives, with babes in arms and small boys carrying bundles—into the Christian refuge. "Let us in," they whispered: "Brigands are at the East Gate!"' Topsy was still fast asleep, but she wakened to see the house full of people, all talking. . .

'It's the Baby General,' they were saying. 'He's raging mad, and now we're for it.'

This General, the youth named Ma Chung Ying, became famous during a Moslem rising in Kansu Province while the Trio were home on leave in 1927. The local population of Moslem Tungans had risen against General Feng's taxes. The young General Ma was the son of a certain General Ma who had been executed by the Chinese, and on the very day that his father died the boy was born. Doubtless he had inherited some of his father's military genius, and to a superstitious people, there was a direct connection between the birth of the child and the departure of the spirit of the old General. So, from his youth, and later, when he became a colonel in the rebel army, he was known as 'General Ma'.

In the Kansu revolt against the Chinese his successes first as a

colonel and then as a General, were almost unbroken. He had courage, and in the thick of battle he would get amongst his men, fighting with them. He was ruthless in victory, and sometimes, when he had captured an oasis town, every male over fourteen would be put to death, women being left to the mercy of his soldiers. In one town, three thousand corpses lay in the streets when he had finished his job. In her book *Forbidden Journey*, Ella K. Maillart suggests that at a moderate estimate the number of his victims in the revolt might easily have been two hundred thousand—this in the Kansu Province where the Trio had lived. Generalissimo Chang Kai Shek is reported to have been visited by the young General at the official Nationalist capital of Nanking in 1930, and to have offered him military rank in the National Chinese Army.

In 1930 the Moslem revolt in far-away Sinkiang had also taken place, and General Ma then joined forces with his co-religionists against the Chinese. Thus two Moslem armies came together against the Chinese Government forces.

By this time Ma was known as 'General Thunderbolt', and his army was living on the countryside, eating up the oasis farms like locusts. Working with General Ma were two mysterious aides who came from Turkey. Both had fought in the 1914-1918 European war, and one was a graduate of Paris University, speaking excellent English and French.

When he crossed into Sinkiang Province from Kansu to join the Turki-Moslem revolt, General Ma made his headquarters at Hami, endeavouring to capture Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang. In a long campaign he defeated the Chinese Government garrison, but at a critical moment and due to Russian help, given to the garrison, the issue was indecisive. General Ma himself was shot in both legs and was carried back to distant Ansi on a litter by his men.

During this political disturbance our Three Women were to be brought into close contact, not only with sufferers from the upheaval but with the principal actors in the events. Meanwhile, in the vast territory covered by the military operations, they continued their work, keeping as far as possible off main roads and travelling on the by-ways as best they could, to avoid the warring armies.

'It was some years since we had visited Tunhwang, which is right off the main road,' they wrote, 'so we decided to go there.' The journey began leisurely, as usual, and would occupy at least two months from Suchow. 'It will be the sixth time that we have visited each oasis between Suchow and Tunhwang,' they said. The first day brought them to the West Gate of the Wall at Kia-yukwan—

where brigand armies had burned down the woodwork for fuel. Official residences appeared to be empty, but they were told that five hundred Moslem cavalry were expected there in an hour. Hurriedly they packed their goods to leave for side-roads, but several times they were halted en route by sentries, whom they had to satisfy concerning their purposes in travel . . . Finally, in and around the Tunhwang oasis, they stayed for several weeks, visiting neighbouring villages. Then one day the General's army arrived there also. The Trio were trapped, and for eight long months they were forced to live under the rule of his officers. The town became one of military occupation, and each day they saw young men press-ganged into military service and marched off, roped together in parties of twenty or thirty, toward Hami. Gradually food became scarce, and 'the luxuriant oasis of Tunhwang became a city of beggars.' Typhus began to take its toll, and the temple entrances were full of men and women in delirium and calling for water to slake their thirst.'

Then, for our Trio, came a time of real crisis. One day the Chinese Magistrate of Tunhwang called them up: 'There is terrible news,' he said: 'the General has come back from Sinkiang to Ansi. He is wounded!' Soldiers began to arrive in greater numbers in Tunhwang, and on a certain Saturday night the Magistrate came to the room in which the Trio were living, with a letter from the Brigand General himself. 'It demanded that he convey under escort two of us to his headquarters at Ansi—four days distant. He had sent his own men to seek us and we were ordered to take medical supplies with us.'

The General was then twenty-one years of age, a powerful figure terrorising the neighbourhood. The Women wrote: 'Making a virtue of necessity, we bowed to the inevitable, but on one or two points we were adamant. We would not be separated, and we insisted on taking our own cart and carter.

'A small group of Christians stood by the roadside to see us go, and they sang the hymn:

*I am weak, but Thou art mighty
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.*

The Captain of the guard turned to his men and said: 'These women can't travel without that'.

'We left Tunhwang on a cold November morning, in company with a band of prisoners, for the journey over the desert. Bread and

tea were our only menu for the next four days . . . At the end of the journey we found it hard to submit to the importunate cross-questioning of a boy-sentinel at the city gate of Ansi as we waited in the bitter cold . . . We were received by a guard of impudent youths handling loaded muskets. It was two hours before they found a room for us.'

During the succeeding days the Trio were ordered to appear each morning before General Ma. 'We had expected to meet a dashing young warrior,' they wrote; 'we found a slim youth. There was a smiling, cruel sensuousness about him, and a shallow flippancy, yet he was reported to be an excellent horseman and a skilled athlete.'

The general occupied the best house in the city, and sat before a brass brazier containing a wood fire which was on a raised dais spread with handsome rugs. As the Trio entered they heard him discussing the execution of a man who had disobeyed him, 'with delicate, languid movements'. He was 'tall, elegant, perfumed and effeminate'. (How they hated him and the desolation he was inflicting on the poor people of the countryside.) 'It was among such people that we moved, and saw the cruelty of the war-lord system.'

The General's weary voice sharpened in fear when he spoke to them concerning his wound, asking if the application of the disinfectant to his unhealed limbs would cause much pain, 'yet before our first interview with him was over, he was giving orders which must have plunged good, honest, hard-working men and women into an abyss of grief'.

Each day the food situation in Ansi became more difficult. Rations were short, shops were shut, the cold intense, and to cap all, their carter discovered that two mules which the Trio had owned in Suchow were actually in a stable nearby. They had been stolen by the soldiery weeks before.

Whenever they visited the General, which they did each day, they were treated with civility, and he himself manifested interest in them—possibly, they felt, because they were frank with him and may have been the only people surrounding him who withheld flattery. For his part he must have seen that such women are not afraid, even of such men, personality and spiritual strength being the last and strongest weapon in our human armoury.

Often during the day, soldiers were brought to Mildred and Francesca for treatment, their wounds often having been caused by old-fashioned firearms, and sometimes the flesh was charred, sometimes septic. 'As I prepared the General's dressing at a side-table,'

wrote Mildred, 'men would be brought in for questioning. Generally they were simple peasants or poor farmers. Their rough, bare feet were thrust into shoes which the poor man's wife makes with such great labour. Their hair was caught back in a thin, short plait . . . Such a man would throw himself on his knees before the indifferent, supercilious young Chief, who would toy with a hunting-knife and never even look toward the peasant:

'Spare my son's life, Your Excellency.'

'Why should I?'

'He is my only son, Your Excellency.'

'The boy is disobedient. I will not change my mind. You may go . . .'

In later years, Mildred Cable sometimes talked to me of the period they spent in the vicinity of General Ma in the town of Ansi. They were virtually prisoners. She would speak of their surroundings and sometimes of their fears, for after all, they were human.

As soon as the General's wounds were healed the Trio were anxious to get away, back to Tunhwang—anywhere—for they had heard a rumour that they might be kept permanently for Red Cross work with the General's Army and to go on his various expeditions. Even at Tunhwang they would still be under his orders, for the road to Suchow was patrolled, and the main roads through to Sinkiang were in the hands of his soldiery.

So they laid a plot, and through one of the two Turkish aides whose wife had been a patient of Mildred, the Trio broached the subject of their return. To their amazement, a few days later the same aide brought them a permit to travel, though it was made clear to them that they were still under the control of the General.

At their last interview with him, Mildred stood before the General. No word was said about their departure, lest in a fit of temper he changed his mind. She produced a copy of the New Testament and a copy of the Ten Commandments, and looking him in the eye, bade him have a care for his own soul . . . He stood motionless, listening quietly to her exhortation. Impassively he saluted the women: they retired—his bodyguard amazed at their courage.

26—THE ESCAPE

GENERAL Ma had received the New Testament from Mildred, together with a frank exhortation, but they left his quarters wondering

'how a shallow man could enter the Kingdom of God'. When they were permitted to leave, a small supply of tinned food—canned by Félix Pottin of Paris—was handed to them. It came from a food dump left by the Citroën Asian Expedition, which had passed that way with special tractors some time before.

The territory under the Brigand General was extensive, reaching from Kanchow through Suchow and as far as the heart of the Gobi at Hami—a distance of some six hundred miles. Tunhwang to which, they returned, was still under his military control. But Tunhwang, we remember, had been chosen by the Trio because it was off the beaten track, several days' journey away from the immediate eye of the Headquarters staff. Here the Trio had rented a house, and it was from Tunhwang that they had been conducted to the General's Headquarters. On being released they were told to keep to the main track, but 'We lost no time in asserting our independence by taking the next turn on the left off the main road,' they wrote. 'It was a hard tug over a pass of volcanic hills . . . but we did it. We broke an axle of our cart and so completely blocked the narrow road, that we were able to command the services of bullock carts held up by us . . . This gave us a day at a hospitable farm where the cart was repaired, and neighbours heard the Gospel.'

Now they returned, found temporary quarters, and continued as cheerfully as they could to conduct their evangelistic tours round the Tunhwang oasis region. Later the local officials permitted them to visit farms several miles on each side of the town, providing they returned at nightfall.

Eight months they spent here and were able to visit in a more leisurely way the Caves of a Thousand Buddhas and the Lake of the Crescent Moon. Rations were difficult. It was impossible to obtain rice, milk and eggs were scarce, their supply of jam was exhausted, and kerosene for lamps was unobtainable, as caravans with supplies no longer travelled through the area. But in spiritual things, they wrote that they were rich, and at Tunhwang the Sunday congregations were larger than ever. Chinese officials were courteous and the Chief-of-Police came to tell them that he was a Christian!

Out of their meagre supplies of flour and fodder each day they put away a little in a secret store, with the firm intention of one day escaping—not back to Suchow for the road was barred, but by taking a risk on the outlying desert roads in a bid to get to the Turkistan frontier, which was still under the Chinese Government.

On 6th April, 1932, they rose early, leaving the town on the north side, as they had often done in visiting the farms. Once away from

the eye of the guards, they turned their mules due south into one of the loneliest by-roads of the desert, seeking by the detour to escape. Before they left their rented house they had endeavoured to disguise their escape by leaving empty tins lying about on the table, so that any Peeping Tom looking through the cracks in the paper windows could not suspect that they were not to return. Pictures were left on the walls, sticks were put in the fireplace ready for kindling.

When they got to the border of the oasis region facing the desert road they expected danger, for there the General's sentinels were on guard. They questioned a local peasant, to find to their amazement that that very morning the guards had been called into Tunhwang town for some special duty. So, half expecting to be challenged at any moment, the women walked quietly through an unsentinelled post into the open Gobi! The General having given orders that they must not leave the Tunhwang oasis, they knew the risk they were taking, but on they went, all that day and through the night—free after months of surveillance. Next day they rested, but when fires were lit, they dug holes in the ground to hide them from view. Roads now became rude tracks, often reduced at that time of the year to soft mud, through which their mules sweated and strained with the carts. At one time they were overtaken by some of the General's desert rangers and sternly challenged, but when they produced very ornate Chinese passports, with plenty of seals and red tape, the illiterate guards were impressed, and with pounding hearts the Trio heard them say: 'Here are your passports, pass on. If you meet difficulties on the way, our men will help you.' They felt that they had been guided to seek escape. It was a severe strain nevertheless, and Mildred, who never found faith easy, was tormented continually, questioning whether they had been wise, wondering if they should have stayed. Yet the memory of past deliverances comforted her.

A week later, still en route, Moslems from the mountains, who were evidently professional thieves, surrounded them, and were heard discussing amongst themselves the carrying off of the possessions of the Three Women. Finally, however, the thieves departed, leaving cart and animals intact. Now and again they would meet a deserter from the army, and share their meal with him in exchange for information about the General's scouts, the position of oasis wells, and possible inns on this road, which they had never travelled before. 'You won't see a creature between here and the Sinkiang border,' they were told, 'unless it is a scout or a brigand.'

Streams had to be crossed at the gallop, and they were fearful lest their underfed animals would get stuck or another axle break. They

themselves waded through the streams and muddy places. Once they were within the Sinkiang frontier at Hsing-Hsing-Hsia they felt that they would be safe, for there they knew was a Chinese garrison, but fear of pursuit, the desolation of the wilderness, the slow pace of thirty miles a day (or night) were such as to make the strongest nerve crack. Desert winds were burning and the sun was strong, for they were now in the Black Gobi. Supposing their food gave out or the fodder for their beasts? What then? Would there be water at the next stop? The strain was terrific. Sometimes, too, there were four-footed wolves at night in addition to the two-footed variety. Here and there they would see signs of recent fighting—blood-stained uniforms lying about, and sometimes the skeletons of men and horses. The carters began to complain that no beast could pull well on such limited rations. But there was no time for delay, and to argue did not help. Moreover, those guards they had met would already have reported their movements—so on they must go.

As they neared what they had formerly known to be the settlement of Great Spring, instead of finding shelter they found desolation, burnt-out homes and blackened walls. They wrote later: 'The desolation was overpowering. Then from behind a mound of rubble crept out a man shaking with fear.' There had been no travel on that road, he told them, for months, and the Chinese National Army that had been there had fled before the 'Thunderbolt's' men . . . Our Trio seem at this point to have been very near the end of their tether—and those grotesque shapes of burnt-out houses, those signs of recent carnage! They had one lantern only between them at night-time as the little caravan silently stumbled along, and now the gaunt-eyed stranger was in a state of complete panic. Such emotion can become infectious. That night, with no shelter and no supper, they lay down utterly exhausted beneath the stars, sleepless, each one keeping her fears to herself . . . Slowly, at long last, morning came. Two of them still dozed, one was still awake, but now, with renewed daylight, she was possessed of a great calm. It had stolen upon her with the words: 'He, watching over Israel, slumbers not, nor sleeps' . . . And she, too, even though it was already dawn, fell asleep . . .

Next day they reached the narrow ravine of the Baboon Pass, generally bristling with nomad-camp life, but along its sides they found trenches freshly dug, with the usual forts on the hillsides, but never a soul in sight. On each side of the gorge, at varying heights, large stones—manlike—had been erected to deceive a distant enemy

that there was an army in occupation. All the Trio heard was the grinding of their cart-wheels and the pad-pad-pad of the feet of their beasts. The claustral silence was oppressive. Four days later, descending steeply, they approached the Turfan Depression, hundreds of feet below sea-level, hot and steamy—a welcome change after travelling over barren mountain ranges for much of the way—and here were the first trees they had seen for a hundred and twenty-five miles. At the oasis of Flowing Water, where Eva had once had a bout of cholera, they came upon a military camp. It received daily supplies of food and fodder, brought from Hami by a string of camels, but surrounding the camp were hundreds of half-starved refugees and prisoners, who had no share in the supplies. On they went, and now every mile brought new signs of fertility and life. Finally, at an oasis town, they rested, and were delighted that there were people who recognised them. It was a marvellous relief that at long last they could relax. But even before their animals were watered and fed, an official came asking for passports. Then he made a further request: one of the officers' ladies needed medicine. Would the Trio please go? So before they could rest or eat, passports had to be attended to, and pills prescribed. Only then were they permitted to take a meal.

Soon a crowd gathered:

'There are three of them, you know.'

'That little girl is deaf and dumb.'

'She eats their food, you see.'

'They were here two years ago—I saw them.'

'Two of them are real sisters. The other one is a dry sister . . .'

Now rested, Mildred went to the inn-stables to see that the animals were being properly tended, and then the final disaster befell them. She did not return . . . Eva went to seek her, only to find that she had been kicked on the head by a tired donkey, had fallen on her face bleeding profusely. She was lying in the stable filth, unconscious. A litter was hastily prepared and Mildred carried into the inn. They set to work to wash her gaping wound, fearing contamination, perhaps tetanus. Hours passed, but the dust, the flies, and the heat made clinical cleanliness well-nigh impossible. Then there was the noise of the sight-seers and residents in the inn. It was essential to keep Mildred as quiet as possible. Anxiously, the two sisters watched and prayed for the recovery of their friend, and for guidance as to what to do next . . . One of them recollected that when they had passed that way before, outside the town wall fringing the oasis there

had been a kindly Chinese gardener with a shady orchard of mulberry trees to which he had once welcomed them for a rest on their journey. Moreover, there was a stream running near to the garden. Could they find the gardener again? Would he permit them to put up their tent? A messenger was hastily sent and twenty-four hours later, Mildred now conscious, they started out in a springless cart. As they left the inn several of the women bystanders who recognised them seemed quite distressed, one calling out, 'God knows all about it' — a remark which the two sisters never forgot.

The cool of the glade gave partial shelter from the wind and sun. A few cool nights, and an abundant supply of fresh running water, worked miracles for their patient. But crowds began to gather for a Moslem celebration which was to take place nearby, and some of the wilder youths, knowing that missionaries were there, began burning Scriptures on the highway. Remembering that once, by a similar arrogant crowd, they had been stoned, Eva went straight to the Mullah at the Mosque. She said to him: 'You may know that we have a very sick person here — just listen to those boys. It is true that we are strangers, and if you wish us to leave, we will move on, but I must ask you to take the responsibility in sending us away.' At the word 'responsibility', the old man seemed to take fright, and within half an hour all was quiet. A few more days passed, and as soon as Mildred was able to travel they moved on in the direction of the still distant Urumchi.

The first stage, understandably, was the most difficult, and at mid-day, with the sun high, Mildred, with bandaged head and still weak, was too tired to travel further. It was a Moslem woman who offered her the hospitality of her home, and Mildred was laid on soft rugs and given the woman's own pillow. All afternoon the woman sat by her, holding her hand, supplying her with cool drinks from a nearby stream, offering her mulberries, and guarding the door against intruders. The Trio were greatly moved by this kindness, for in that same village only two years before they had been stoned.

At Turfan itself, despite the heat, Mildred, marked for life by the scar, was now able to look up some of her former patients, but could do no more. On they moved, and after a further eight weeks of travel they came to Urumchi, where Percy Mather, having had no news of them for months but hearing a rumour that they were on the way, had galloped out on his grey horse to meet them. Carts full of Christian women from the local Church came along the road to welcome them, and the British Vice-Consul from Kashgar, who

had been perturbed that three British subjects had been in bandit territory for months, was also awaiting them.

Their circular letters, after describing these adventures, say simply: 'When the excitement concerning our arrival had simmered down, we conferred as to the best means of reaching the women of Urumchi . . . The town was "posted", visited and preparations made for large meetings . . . The response was beyond our expectations.'

LAST YEARS IN CHINA

THE WILLOW COTTAGE

As a result of their nomadic life in China, with its insecurity and constant travel, our Three Women had begun to cherish a secret longing for peace and a period of immobility. In a letter to friends, they had written: 'Somewhere in Dorset, in a village we have never yet seen, is a little stone cottage, which we cannot locate because we have never been there, but it is *ours* —our own. It was offered to us by cablegram and by cablegram we bought it. We have told no one; it is our secret! Hitherto, our furloughs have been spent in sampling various kinds of London's *caravanserais*, but we have wearied of them all. Now we have a place of our very own — "The Willow Cottage".' Despite this desire for quiet and rest, these hospitable women, even after some forty years amongst China's millions, could not refrain from adding: 'Our friends will always be welcome.'

Six times they had toured the north-west, from Inner Mongolia to Tibet, from Kansu Province to Sinkiang. For nearly ten years they had been homeless wanderers, and they recorded: 'There is no denying that signs of wear and tear are evident, so we prefer to travel without a mirror!' That was on the physical plane, but at another level they were able to say: 'The meaning and reality of Christ have become intense. He is Saviour, Guardian, Friend — Way and End. We have lacked nothing.'

In 1932 they started for home once more, travelling across Sinkiang as before, via Siberia, Moscow, Berlin to London. They had been in China during four more restless and eventful years. To and fro, backwards and forwards, they had traversed the Gobi trade-routes and oasis-towns, visiting fairs, festivals, homes, hitherto unknown to them, some of which had become little 'house-churches'. Now they were tired, physically and psychologically, for this had been the most exhausting tour of their missionary service — at any rate, since Eva had gone through the Boxer Rising thirty years before. China was still in the turmoil of civil war. Russia was strengthening her economic hold on west China as the price of help, her influence being felt even along the desert routes, in addition to her

possession of vast territory to the north of China from the Urals to Vladivostock and extending along the Pacific Coast for a thousand miles.

When the Trio got to London they wrote: 'Never since we were children had we been so excited . . . It all seemed so secure and safe.' The date was September 1932, and they were *home*—all three and Topsy, too.

To their growing number of friends they wrote a half apologetic circular (as though they had no right to rest): 'The reason for furlough is recuperation for further witness. Till February 1933 we will rest and then for twelve months we will be available for meetings in various parts of Britain.'

The Trio had become well known figures on missionary platforms in Britain, and their books were increasingly read. After their rest invitations crowded in upon them from every part of the country . . .

The Willow Cottage was certainly a haven. On one side there was a small garden, used characteristically more for vegetables than for flowers, for the Trio were 'economy minded'. On the other side, at the end of the garden, was a wooden hut, some twenty yards away, where the individual privacy of each of them was respected. This was the place, too, where their books were written. By the help of friends circular letters went out periodically. At public meetings, in colleges, schools and youth groups, as well as by talks given to learned societies, increasing interest was aroused in these travellers, who had first-hand knowledge of the shadow-lands of Central Asia, and moving stories to tell of them.

By 1934 Mildred and Francesca had completed a manuscript for publication which covered the period of their travels from June 1928 to June 1932. The book *A Desert Journal*, was described by Alan Broderick as 'comparable with the story of a Shackleton, a Grenfell or a Livingstone'.

For the Trio 'relaxation' did not mean inaction. It meant a change of occupation, and during this same furlough (1933-1934) they also wrote *Something Happened*, which, they said, was an endeavour to answer the question—'Why do they do it?' 'What takes these three women to such God-forsaken places?' a British Government officer asked. 'It can't be for money, it can't be for record-breaking, and the romance must have vanished long ago. Why do they do it?' The Trio's answer in *Something Happened* is a moving story of the experience of the Presence of God in difficult situations and circumstances, and it ran into nearly twenty editions. Biographical in form, it endeavoured to illustrate what practical trust in God could

really mean, and was written 'For all companions engaged in spiritual warfare.'

The story of God's guidance to these women in Asia was becoming a spiritual stimulus to many church-going people at home; young people including students were quite as eager to hear their message as the older folk.

Their ministry was no longer confined to Asia, for as we shall later see, new channels of witness were opening for them in Britain . . .

Nevertheless, the time for their return to China and the leaving of their Willow Cottage finally came, and after a moving farewell meeting in the Kingsway Hall, London, in 1935, they went across to the Continent for a breathing space before once more plunging back into Central Asia by the long Trans-Siberian route. They chose to stay near to some of the old haunts of the French family in the Pas de Calais, 'the spot nearest to England,' for nomads though they were, England was dear to them. They climbed the lighthouse at Cap Gris Nez whose lights are sometimes visible from the white cliffs of Dover. They wandered across 'the Field of the Cloth of Gold', where Henry of England met François of France in gorgeous pageantry. They saw again Rodin's monument, recalling the occasion when the citizens of Calais surrendered to an English army.

But their dreams were not all nostalgic. They enjoyed seeing the annual race of the *garçons de café* in Calais, when, dodging the congested traffic of the *Grande Place*, each waiter raced with a tray balanced on the fingers of one hand, the tray bearing a full jug of water, an upstanding bottle and a brimming glass of beer.

They moved on to Belgium, where Francesca had been born. They found Brussels in mourning for Queen Astrid who had been killed in a motor accident in Switzerland . . . In Berlin, while Eva and Francesca met old friends, Topsy and Mildred spent an afternoon at the zoo, feeling (so Mildred put it) 'more like guests in an animals' park than inquisitive humans gazing at caged beasts'. In the children's enclosure, where tiny dwarfs sat at the doors of little houses, Topsy was thrilled as bear cubs and tiger cubs frolicked together, and Shetland ponies nosed boldly up to small visitors asking to be fed . . . Later, they all paid a midnight visit to the Observatory, to peer through the long telescope at the beauty of Saturn's rings. Finally, friends from Sweden and from several parts of Germany, who were interested in Central Asia, attended a small farewell supper-party, and at 11.28 p.m. the long train steamed out of Berlin.

It was a bitter-sweet occasion, for the Trio had a sinking feeling that not only was Central Asia, to which they were going, on the threshold of world-shaking events, but perhaps Central Europe also. Hitler was already German Chancellor. Parliamentary opposition to him was being suppressed, and shortly afterwards Germany left the League of Nations.

‘As we left Germany,’ the Trio wrote to their friends, ‘we knew that we travelled forward into conditions where European news would be a blank . . . We can give you no idea as to where we shall spend the winter . . . we need courage to face what lies immediately ahead . . .’ As they continued their journey into Asia, they wrote to their friends: ‘Literally, we only see our way a day at a time . . . It looks as if we have but one hour of fading light in which to give the final witness. Speaking of lofty things at this hour is a work of faith indeed . . . Share the conflict with us . . .’

Their journey back was totally different from their home-going. From Berlin to Urumchi there was one inclusive fare—£30 per head ‘all found’—by efficient Russian ‘Intourist’. They needed no money for travel, for food, for hotels—only vouchers, and as Mildred said, ‘Three good meals a day, with Eva and Topsy eating large chunks of cream-cake for breakfast, cheered us up.’ Changing trains at Novo Sibirsk, they expected, as hitherto, to huddle in a buffet awaiting the next train, but no! a welcome handshake from a bright young man of Russia’s ‘Intourist’, a tram car for twenty minutes into the town, and then accommodation at a hotel called ‘The Red Prospect’! All things were done in perfect order—including the compulsory bath before they were permitted to go to their bedrooms! And after that, more welcoming Russian gestures which even Topsy identified as meaning: ‘Supper is served’ . . . ‘Do we pay for boiling water at each station?’ they asked in German. ‘No, you just take all you want, but give no money,’ was the reply.

They rubbed their eyes. Were they actually in Siberia? or was this a chromium-plated heaven? ‘Tips are not expected and must *not* be given.’ It was all quite wonderful.

Next day they had tea accompanied by orchestral music in the palm court of the restaurant in the same hotel, but they were still suspicious of all this worldly splendour! Their keen eyes noted that the palms had been sawn off at the root. The faded leaves had been revived with a coat of green paint! They noted it but said not a word—though they thought quite a lot. Were those palms a parable? After all, social welfare and well-being were really Christian action,

but in Russia hadn't these things been cut off at the roots from the Tradition which had given them birth? Surely, it was the Christian seed, dropped nineteen hundred years ago, which had started all this . . . Was not present-day Communism really a Christian heresy?

Whatever the answer, their needs were met. 'Never since the days of childhood have we been so completely taken in hand and done for,' they wrote. 'All turned out as promised.'

As they were thinking these thoughts in that gilded restaurant, the young man from 'Intourist', glancing first at them, went up to the conductor of the orchestra. Then he came back to them, all smiles, to say: 'We play English music for you, Foxtrot.' The Trio thought that the tune was: 'Mr. Brown, how do you do?' but possibly this was their translation of 'Knees up, Mother Brown!' When, however, the orchestra burst forth with the tune, Eva's toes began to tap, for she had been an excellent dancer in her youth, and history records that, along with other people in the foyer, the Trio joined in the chorus: 'Mr. Brown, how do you do? How do you, do you, do? . . .'

Next morning a closed bus replaced what in past years of travel had been an open truck. Instead of night travel they stayed at rest-houses, 'with a cup of tea and a few hours' sleep'. At Baxti there was a bubbling *samovar* and slices of black bread and hard-boiled eggs — still free of charge. Half an hour later they were back on the Chinese frontier, and while it was 'goodbye' to the comfortable chromium-plated efficiency it was the beginning of heart-warming personal greetings and friendly comment.

'Here they are back again, and the little "Deaf-and-dumb" is here, too. Lucky child, how she has grown! Come down, and have a cup of tea.'

They still had no money, only vouchers, but the Post Office official loaned them cash, and gave them the cheerful news that the loads of Scriptures they had ordered months before from the Bible Society in London had already been sent on ahead to Urumchi. Then, hearing that they were travelling east, a young German with a motor-truck offered them places for the three days' journey to Urumchi — instead of the eighteen stages by horse-drawn cart.

But there were empty places in Sinkiang. Their cook, Brother Chen, and another of their helpers whom they called 'Sir Thomas Cook' — the two they had left behind with Mr. Hunter — were both in prison. Percy Mather and Emil Fischbacher, a missionary doctor, had both died since the Trio had passed that way. 'The graves looked out to Karashan,' the Trio wrote, 'where Percy Mather brought Christ to the Mongols. We carried garlands to the graves —

the offerings of a Chinese youth whose wounds had been cared for by Dr. Fischbacher.' Some years later Mildred unveiled a plaque in a Fleetwood Methodist church—the home church of Percy Mather.

But in Urumchi, with Sinkiang still in turmoil, there were no visas for them to go forward, despite consular help, and they had to stay there for many long months. Moreover, their two servants were still in jail.

The town was much improved, however. No animal now drowned in the mud pits of Main Street, which had become a levelled road for motor traffic, with a pedestrian footpath on each side. Heavy Russian trucks, as well as a few scarlet taxis, ploughed through the streets. Telephones and electric light were evident, and a town motor-bus service had just started running from the Russian quarter to the Manchu quarter. Good-natured crowds stood and listened to music, to talks, to instructions, from street-corner loud-speakers. Turfan peasants, however, still drove their herds of little donkeys, and the old water-carts, glistening with icicles, still meandered through the streets, while trains of camels got somehow mixed up with State-owned bicycles. The broadcast propaganda in various languages amused the laughing Mongols, but it left the travelling lamas gaping with open-mouthed awe. Dispensaries and hospitals, staffed, even in this Chinese territory, by Russian doctors, had been built, and reports said that hospital beds were clean, nursing good, and no fees accepted. Illiteracy was being strenuously attacked by new schools using the Chinese, Tartar, Mongolian, Turki and Russian languages. But still no visas came for the Christian missionaries, and Brother Chen, the Christian, was still in prison—kept there (so the Trio heard) on a technical fault of having endeavoured to return to Suchow without a permit.

There was nothing for it but to carry on local evangelism, so they visited Christian friends as best they could. Slowly they began to realise that their former freedom was at an end. They wrote: 'It is our hope, during this necessarily brief tour of missionary work, to revisit the Christians along the oasis-routes which we have previously covered in our journeys.'

China was now between two fires—the increasing penetration of Japan in the East and the less warlike Russian pressures from the West, with European Powers still dominant. As far back as 1932 Japan had taken Manchuria from China and about a year after the Three Women got back Japan renewed her attacks—this time more openly, when Japanese troops clashed with the Chinese sentries on the Marco Polo Bridge in Peking.

But at long last the Chinese themselves were aroused. Mao Tse Tung, who as a young man had taken part in the 1911 Revolution, had become a Communist in 1920, and by 1931 was made Chairman of the Council of Peoples' Commissars, struggling in South China against Chiang Kai Shek and the official National Government. By 1935, the year the Trio arrived back, Mao broke out from the hill country of the south by the 'long march' across mid-China to Shensi Province. During 1936 Japan became more menacing, so Mao made an alliance with the National Government, and both joined forces against Japan. Truly, the Trio were back in the thick of it.

During their stay in Urumchi they became conscious that their movements were being watched, and anyone visiting them was questioned. So even old friends became afraid.

On New Year's Day, 1936, the Trio paid a courtesy call upon the local Chinese Governor, and again ventured to mention the matter of their permission to travel to Kansu Province. Happily, they found a new official in charge. He carried under his arm a copy of the *London Times*, and told them he had read Peter Fleming's articles on his Central Asian travels 'with great interest'. The Trio replied cautiously that the *Times* was 'a very reliable paper'. . . One month later they got their visas, but even then their two servants were still in prison. 'We accept the Governor's decision,' Eva bluntly told an official, 'but he takes great responsibility in compelling three women to cross the Gobi Desert without even a servant.' The word 'responsibility' again helped. 'Sir Thomas Cook' was released, and they were permitted to go, but 'Brother Chen', with deep regret, had to be left behind. They bade farewell to Mr. Hunter and to a new man on the Urumchi staff of the C.I.M., Mr. W. J. Drew, and started on their way, with two four-wheeled Russian carts, each drawn by three horses. On the 21st May, 1936, they entered their beloved Kansu Province at the military post of Hsing-Hsing-Hsia — to find that General Ma, the 'Thunderbolt', and his Turki armies had made what the Trio called 'a hell on earth of the place'. And this was typical of the countryside.

Desiring to visit people on the way they decided to travel by cart rather than by the new motor transport. Their new driver was a rather flashy youth. One day he would dress in a Russian leather coat, mounted with brass buttons. The next, he would wear a velvet smoking-jacket with a lambskin cap. After weeks of travel they came again to the deep depression of Turfan, and were greeted everywhere by the same desolation. Nevertheless there was personal warmth to cheer them. 'My inn is not open. No one has stayed here for years,'

said a landlord, 'but I must make room for old friends.' Homes were in ruins, the population often living in hovels, but they found that many of the mosques had been repaired, and before dawn, in the towns and villages, people came to the Moslem call to prayer. Despite the widespread desolation of the Moslem rebellion against the Chinese, the Trio were now free to visit their friends to the right and to the left of the Old Silk Road, and they were welcomed. It was four years since they had passed that way.

'At Shan Shan people ran from their farms to greet us. In places which we reached at dusk, rooms were cleared for us, and we were cheered to find that many knew the Gospel Story. But our friends, the Chinese Magistrate and his handsome Russian wife, with their beautiful children, had all been killed. We visited their home. It was empty and pathetic: on the wall was the picture of the "Prodigal Son" which we had given them when we had passed that way.'

At bustling Hami, the Chinese Headquarters which the 'Thunderbolt' had never quite succeeded in subduing, the Trio found people very receptive, and would have stayed longer, but they were anxious to get back to Suchow. However, they did stay there for a week, but they felt increasingly that doors were closing and that time was short. At their rate of travel, with visitation along some of the oasis byways to towns they knew, it would still take three months to get to Suchow.

'Central Asian matters, viewed at close range, are blurred by the rapidity of the changes,' they wrote. 'The widespread propaganda comes with a sense of shock to the elderly, but to the young it brings a sense of freedom. Even Islam is shaken by the impact . . . There is an enormous network of public officers, an organisation of secret police, a nervous "proletariat" . . .'

28—SIXTY-SEVEN AND NOT OUT

STILL a hundred and fifty miles from Suchow, they decided to turn aside for one more visit to the Tunhwang oasis, where they had been confined for months during the revolt of the 'Thunderbolt'. Christian families were still there, and being a well-watered area it had a considerable population. The route was several days off the main road, but after the wintry highlands over which they had been travelling—sometimes camping in the snow—the warmer valley approach would be welcome. 'Our bodies are hardened like tempered steel through exposure to such extremes of temperature,' they

wrote to a friend in Leeds. On the way they passed the inn where Eva had once had cholera, which brought back memories of anxiety and professional nursing by Francesca and Mildred. There were still signs that the dread disease had caused considerable gaps amongst the population.

Further on they began to feel the benefit of a lower altitude and warmer weather, for they were now only a thousand feet above sea-level. On this lower path the route ran along a valley which the Trio had once called 'God's rock-garden'. 'The camel-thorn was a gossamer veil of pale verdure, the rhubarb leaf a bold splash of vermilion, while from every creamy stem a little rockflower lifted its blossom of blue, pink or russet brown. We left the cart at the roadside to pick sand-chives, whose leaf bears a lovely blossom which, tossed into the pan, gave us a dish of vegetables, greatly appreciated after days of dry bread and stodgy macaroni. Out of the sandiest patches shoots a fungus like red-hot poker. Scraped and steamed, they have a sweet flavour.'

They came to a well, rested, fed and watered their animals, and then a sudden thought occurred to Francesca. It was 26th May—the eve of Eva's birthday—and in all their travels they had never allowed a birthday of any one of them to go unheeded. Why not stay there for the night and celebrate? Mildred and Francesca had been wondering for some days how they could possibly celebrate Eva's birthday in the open Gobi, where, indeed, they had been relying on their water-bottles for survival. 'After travelling all night,' they wrote, 'at 7 a.m. we had stepped from grit to soil and come to a glade of tamarisks . . . Soon we were on the bank of a stream.' Somewhere in their luggage was a packet of baking powder and a glass jar of potted-meat, given them months before by Sir Eric Teichman, the Consul at Kashgar, who had visited them during their long enforced stay in Urumchi. Out came these precious possessions, and a table was spread on the banks of the stream. One of them lit a fire, and with the help of the baking powder some scones were made, 'to which was added the last lick of Chuguchak honey'. In half an hour Eva was called to a clean table-cloth spread under the trees. She was sixty-seven, and this was her 'birthday breakfast'. It is not certain that they sang 'Happy Birthday to You' as they stood looking at their meal, but these three women did actually sing 'Grace', in gratitude to God—they said—for a little treat so unexpected. Later, they recalled that the meal was accompanied by the refreshing ripple of the running stream and, the meal over, each in turn disappeared behind the bushes for a bathe in the stream, for which, they wrote, 'we had been waiting for weeks.'

When they finally arrived at Tunhwang they found that many of the Christians had been scattered, due to the troublous times through which the neighbourhood had passed. Though the 'Thunderbolt' had gone and the National Army was again in control, things were far from easy. But they found friends, and the sentry at the city gate (from which they had escaped four years previously) actually called them by name as they approached. He had been a boy in one of their village classes. A priest in the local temple had been a boy in the same age-group as Topsy, and was one of her acquaintances. An army officer in the large garrison was one of their former students from the Kanchow Bible School. And among the garrison were sons of Christian families of a dozen different towns of Kansu Province. The wife of the Commandant, although not a Christian, came from a Christian home. Eva soon had a group of young women, teaching them the new phonetic Chinese script, which was sponsored by the Government. A few days later, on what the Trio spoke of as 'a red-letter day', some who had been waiting for baptism were baptised. The Trio stayed on for the yearly festival of the local deities, which they knew would be well attended, and they planned their usual visitation of many surrounding oasis-farms and villages. Amid the familiar smells and fumes of incense mixed with the odour of linseed cooking oil and garlic, they took up their work with the help of some Christian young women of the locality. 'The Christian women, though unaccustomed to such aggressive evangelism, proved a great help,' they wrote. 'They went straight to the village women as like to like, with an innate knowledge of how to approach them . . . An interested crowd gathered around the cart, from which they and "Sir Thomas Cook" sold books and preached the Gospel.'

At a certain hour they noticed that a curious lull came upon the whole crowded proceedings of the festival. Merchants ceased to shout about their goods and music died down. In the shadow of the shrines, and even at the foot of the great idols themselves, opium lamps were lighted and pipes passed from hand to hand as each one, down to young children, drew whiffs from the smouldering drug. Meanwhile, during the opium siesta, priests and missionaries appeared to have done some 'hobnobbing'. One of the priests remarked: 'What you tell us of God is *true*, but where should we be but for the shelter of the temple and the gifts of the faithful?' Alas, where would they be—where would all priests and preachers be? Perhaps on the Cross . . .

As they moved on towards Suchow they wrote: 'It is good to

know that Sunday services will continue after we have left Tunhwang, but the preacher of the Gospel has joy only if he keeps free from the bondage of reckoning by numbers, and is content to scatter the Seed wherever he goes. On the other hand it is a disappointing area for the statistician, whose joy is in a compact, tidy, well-ordered return, published in an Annual Report.' Missionary work is not always a success story, though it is often painted as such, due to the lack of faith of its supporters at home . . .

'You have been here five times,' said a bystander as they passed along the road. 'I saw you in Barkul . . . You have been to my mother's home in Turfan, too, yet you turn up just the same as ever. I suppose in your country you are not even old at a hundred! Look at us—at seventy we are done for.'

Another gossip then chipped in:

'You don't know what you are talking about,' he said to the first. 'These Venerable Ladies eat no pork, neither do they smoke opium or tobacco. They don't drink wine: they don't even wear ear-rings! Besides, they have neither husband nor children, and all that keeps them young. They have an undivided heart for good works!'

There was still a long drag ahead of them to the 'Great Mouth' of the West Gate of China, and twenty more miles beyond that to Suchow—many 'stages' and many weeks, for they steadily continued to gossip the Gospel on the way. Now, however, they noted that the road was no longer lonely, though most of the travellers were moving in the opposite direction from them. It appeared that there had been a famine in the lower Kansu Province, and many they met were seeking work and food in the opium fields in fertile Tunhwang. Wayfarers told them that in Suchow alone five thousand people were living on a meal of millet a day, and hundreds of others had died.

Some of the travellers they talked to at various inns had brighter stories. One such was a man and his family, who reported travelling with Mr. Peter Fleming and with Ella Maillart (an autographed copy of whose book *Forbidden Journey*, published in 1937, was later amongst the Trio's treasured possessions). Further on they heard that hungry wolves were roaming over various parts of the route, so whenever possible they avoided sleeping in the open. At another point they met a party of bright Chinese students, who claimed to know all about the Trio's long journeys. It turned out that one of the jobs of the 'students' was to instruct poor villagers, less versed in the ways of Marxism, as to how national life should be organised.

The Trio noted: 'Our own tent, sleeping bags, bowl and chopstick outfits compared poorly with the fine camp furniture, beds, blankets, cooking-stoves, cups, saucers, knives and forks of the 'students'. But when they saw Topsy, they were really intrigued. 'Deaf and dumb, you know,' said one to the others, 'and they *adopted* her — that's the *real thing*.'

On another day they came to a broken-down inn, and were surprised to find in it a group of good looking, well dressed girls, with plucked eyebrows and abundant make-up on their faces — this in a Gobi oasis! They, too, were trekking west. The Trio were curious, and walking into an inner room, they found, lying on a mattress and smoking opium, the mistress of the girls. 'My nieces,' she said, 'travelling with me to Tunhwang.' Outside, the girls were more talkative, and told the Trio that one of them had been bought in Lanchow, another in Kaotai, another in Suchow . . . 'These are times of famine,' wrote the Three Women, 'and fear of starvation plays havoc with human nature. Numbers of young girls are sold to those who make a profit from the misfortune of others. Girls are cheap in Kansu, but expensive in Sinkiang. A merchant puts a little girl to ride on one of his donkeys. She costs a dollar down in Kansu, but is worth ten in Hami.'

At the Gate of Kiayükwan the Trio discovered that six men from the Suchow church, hearing that they were on the way, had travelled out twenty miles to meet them. Among them, of course, was Elder Liu. It was now four years since they had left Suchow, when it had been isolated by the armies of General Ma and they had become his prisoners in Tunhwang. But disasters had fallen upon the country since then: civil war, famine, and more recently typhus. Many were the gaps in the Church membership they knew, but it had been reinforced by later baptisms.

During the absence of the Trio, Sir Ivor Beauchamp, a qualified doctor, accompanied by his wife, having been prevented from travelling through to Sinkiang had stayed for many months in Suchow. They had hoped to continue the work in Urumchi of Dr. Emil Fischbacher, who had died of typhus; but by March 1934 their convoy of lorries had been met by the armies of General Ma, who turned them back, using their lorries and stores. 'All this was in the territory which the Trio had travelled so often,' writes Sir Ivor. 'On more than one occasion, soldiers gathered in a small tent, interested in the Gospel, especially when they heard that we were associated with the "Three Venerable Lady Teachers". At Suchow, we were received with open arms by the leaders of the church, who set at

our disposal suitable accommodation in the church compound, which had been the home of the Three Ladies. We spent about six months in Suchow in happy co-operation with the church. In addition to the regular Sunday services, I was invited by the church leaders to run a medical clinic and to go with them on regular street preaching expeditions, using posters and Scripture portions of which they kept a stock. Travelling up and down this famous North-West highway, we frequently met those who knew the Ladies, and we were particularly impressed by the thoroughness of the publicity work they had done. Gospel posters in an excellent state of preservation were often to be seen high up in strategic positions, such as city gateways . . .'

When the Trio got back they found that the National Government had improved roads in Suchow and that street drainage had been installed. There was a weekly motor service to distant Lanchow. But the Christian people there had been troubled and confused by the arrival of a party of Seventh Day Adventist missionaries, telling them that they should worship God on Saturday in place of Sunday. Christians who had never known sectarianism, wrote the Trio, 'were greatly puzzled'. So, to the burdens of a harassed population was now added that of a divided Christendom. 'Men who hold a theory of a Church which excludes from communion those whom they admit to have the Spirit of Christ, simply proclaim that their theory is in flat contradiction to the spiritual fact. Their theory separates those whom the Spirit unites,' wrote Roland Allen.* And with that the Trio would have warmly agreed.

Soon they started up the children's services, which had hitherto been so popular, together with a daily Bible class and a literacy class for the teaching of the phonetic script. 'We can boast that the Church of the north-west is a literate Church,' they wrote. 'Our time is filled with visits from old friends and new. We are received in many new homes, and a group of women comes to us each afternoon for teaching. Each day brings its full measure of joy — and of sorrow, as we miss old friends.'

Time passed. Visiting and journeys were renewed, and the other activities taken up again . . . Gradually it became evident, however, that Mildred was beginning to feel the strain, particularly of travel at high altitudes. She was having long periods of insomnia. None of the Three was young any longer, and Mildred was younger than the other two. Moreover, at the back of everyone's mind — including the Chinese — was the thought of the continued unrest throughout China, and the growing devastation. At Tunhwang rumours had

* *The Ministry of the Spirit*, World Dominion Press.

spread. At Suchow the city gates were guarded so that none could pass without a special permit. The Trio wrote to friends at home: 'The Churches of the north-west, which have already been sifted like wheat, are now threatened with additional trials. We commit them to your spiritual care.'

Then came news of Communist troop movements, first on the east and then on the west. Finally the local Government garrison vanished into the mountains. The Trio went quietly on with their work, but on 25th August, 1936 came a sudden order: 'All foreigners to leave Suchow immediately.'

In one of their letters they wrote: 'Things tighten more and more, and finally the hard hour has come when we have to tell the Christians that we must leave, for our common-sense warns us that our presence here is a danger to our converts. So long as we are here the Christians will refuse to leave us, and together—foreigners and Chinese Christians are a tempting target' . . . So the end had come.

After a tearful farewell, motor-lorries whirled them away . . . sad at heart. At Kanchow, the motor-lorry broke down. Word went quickly round the town, and they were soon surrounded by old friends. A Chinese woman missionary from Shanghai was hard at work there, and the Government had invited her to take over the headship of the girls' school. The Trio slept the night at Kanchow, and at 6 a.m. next morning the Christians turned up to share the whole day with them.

On and on, along new and smooth tarmac roads, to Liangchow where the Trio had a day with Chinese Christian women, though missionaries had gone. On to Lanchow, from whence, the road being cut, the journey must be completed by air. What improvements over the years! If only the National Government could have had more time to continue their work. Below the Trio lay that Old Silk Road, along which they had meandered since 1923. From the air they wrote: 'It lay, a little pale thread below us, and the distance it took us twenty days to cover at three miles an hour, we now covered in two hours, ten minutes.' At Sian they stayed with the Baptist Missionary Society for a week, and here for the first time for many a day, Mildred began to feel rested. A band of missionaries still lingered there—members of many missionary societies: Bishop Shen, of the S.P.G., Swedish associates of the C.I.M., members of the Chinese Home Missionary Society and of the Mission Hospital staff (two of whose nurses had been trained by the Trio at Hwochow years before. All met together weekly for fellowship and prayer.

The next stage of the journey was by the 'Green Express', with restaurant car and a six-course meal for two shillings a head. The train attendants were students of the Peking Upper School and all spoke English—concerning which the Trio remarked: 'Chinese seemed almost taboo.'

And so, on to Peking . . .

The Trio were now to leave China for good. What did the future hold—for China and for them?

But a more immediate question was, Which way home—by sea or by Trans-Siberian Railway? The decision turned on the question of cost. Finding that they could make the journey to London from Peking by railway for the sum of £25 per head, they chose the over-land route.

There were four classes on the International Express: first and second, followed by what the Trio called, 'soft' and 'hard'. The first and second classes had *coupés de luxe*, well sprung and well upholstered—mostly filled with Russians on official business and travelling on 'expense accounts'. The question for the Trio was—is it to be 'hard' or 'soft'? But there was no real question, for, as usual, they decided to travel 'hard'—it was cheaper!

RETIREMENT BUT NOT RETREAT

29—A DIARY OF WAR DAYS

THE return to England of our Trio made them realise their need for a time of quiet, in which to think through recent events: experiences in China and on their last long journey home. 'That quiet,' they wrote, 'we now have.'

The Willow Cottage was not far from Shaftesbury Dorset and the landscape breathed the atmosphere of a countryside knit together over the centuries by historical processes which had 'kept the noiseless tenor of their way'. Situated on a hill-promontory overlooking this typically English scene, the place had been there almost undisturbed for a thousand years: the old abbey, the village common, corners for tanning hides, for laundering clothes, for the fishing of a community which had gathered itself together around the abbey gates. A few miles away at Stourton, King Alfred, who translated the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon and codified early English Law, had defeated Danish invaders in the year 878. A tower stood there to commemorate the event. In Shaftesbury itself was a Castle Hill, a Park Walk, and the ruins of the abbey, where Alfred's daughter, Ethelriva, had been Abbess, and Steward of the local Manorial Court, with the right, even as a woman, of being summoned to Parliament. In 979 the body of King Edward the Martyr had been buried there, and there, too, in 1035, Canute had died. Life had been a unity, built around an ageless church: worship at the heart of community life.

The garden at Willow Cottage was the responsibility of Francesca, and 'thanks to the cuttings and seeds she shamelessly begs from friends, it has become a joy to us all. Jasmine, honeysuckle, mignonne are in bloom, and we are eating our own apples, pears and plums. Mildred, on the other hand, has converted the meadow-land into quite a lawn, but Eva will have none of these frivolities, and occupies herself with highbrow pursuits at her desk! Topsy helps each one of us in turn, as well as looking after her own strip of land in the garden. Household duties are shared by all of us, but Eva sees to it that they are kept to a minimum, for she detests housework!'

'We hear of the death of Elder Liu, and remember that ever since he was flogged by General Ma's men, he had been in poor health.

This is a personal sorrow to us, for he was our companion through many vicissitudes . . . But we also hear that Brother Chen, our former cook, has been finally freed from prison in Urumchi.' Yet it was not all reminiscing and listening to the radio. Even as our Trio settled down in quiet Dorset they were alive to the need for involvement in life. From Shaftesbury they wrote: 'We are deeply impressed with the opportunity that normal life in this place supplies.'

Once rested, and as invitations to speak at meetings increased, they were drawn more and more into missionary advocacy and the work of the missionary societies. And they began to feel that while they must retain the Willow Cottage at Shaftesbury as a retreat, they needed a London home. So in September 1937 they rented a flat in Hampstead, and from this time on their diary begins to read like a railway time-table:

<i>September</i>	28	Students at Swanwick.
<i>October</i>	1	I.V.F. Annual Meeting, London.
	6	Royal Central Asian Society, London.
	7	Central Asian Mission, Caxton Hall.
	13	B.F.B.S. Kingsway Hall.
	15-25	Students, Aberystwyth University.
	27-28	Oxford.
<i>November</i>	2	B.F.B.S. Croydon.
	3	B.F.B.S. Reading.
	4	Wimbledon.
	7	Dr. Barnardo's Homes.
	9	St. Columba's Presbyterian Church, London.
	10	Bristol.
	11	Dorchester.
	15-22	Durham University.
	24	Presbyterian Church, Hampstead.
<i>December</i>	1-8	London University.

They had several outstanding interests: the China Inland Mission, which had originally sent them to the Far East; the Salvation Army, whose practical social work Eva had loved since her Geneva days; the Bible Society, which had never failed them in its supply of Scriptures in almost every language of Central Asia. Student movements of various kinds, Crusader Groups, Christian Unions—all appealed to them.

Back again at Shaftesbury for a few weeks, Mildred and Francesca were busy writing a new book, entitled *Toward Spiritual Maturity*. It was about this time that I, too, paid my first visit to the Trio in

Shaftesbury. Mildred met me in a small Ford car at a little railway station. I had gone to talk to them about recent developments and proposals in the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which at that time was being extended on the home front. A wider appeal to women was planned, youth work had been begun a few years before, exhibitions were being built, films of the overseas work were being shot, and the regional and district staff reorganised. In all this the Trio were more than interested, and I shall never forget the drive from the station to the Willow Cottage, with Mildred at the wheel of the Ford. She was eager to hear what the Society was planning, and told me how their work had been quite dependent upon it in Central Asia.

‘Do you know Dorset?’ she asked, with a wave of one hand over the countryside. Pointing with the other, she said: ‘Shaftesbury lies over there.’ Another wave, and: ‘That’s the hill where the abbey stood’ . . .

It was an exciting ride. The only things which seemed to be unimportant were the twists and turns of the Dorset’s tortuous lanes, and a rather loose driving-wheel on the car. But on this occasion ‘nothing happened’, so we arrived safely at the Willow Cottage.

Soon afterwards a letter followed me to the Bible House in Queen Victoria Street, saying: ‘We have prayed about it, and consulted some of our friends. We will help the Society for three months, taking meetings wherever you feel we can be of service . . .’ And that arrangement was the beginning of a happy partnership which lasted for another fifteen years.

1939 came, and the war.

Dunkirk had taken place in August 1940, and life in Britain had become more intense. The Bible House in Queen Victoria Street, where Miss Cable now had an office, like many other buildings in the City of London had to play a part in civic affairs, and the basement had been requisitioned as an official air-raid shelter for a hundred people. After their day’s work the Society’s staff, who were responsible for the normal air-raid precautions in the six-storey building, took it in turn to run a canteen at night and to attend to the needs of people in the shelter. The Society’s library of Scriptures in some thousand languages was still mainly in the basement of the building, but the more valuable manuscripts and some first editions had been deposited in the crypts of various distant cathedrals. The Control Centre for A.R.P. organisation in the immediate area was housed in the office of *The Times* close by, and the ground floor of

Unilever House across the road on the Embankment had been turned into a miniature First Aid hospital, with doctor and nurses from Bart's Hospital in attendance. On the other side of Ludgate Hill, the Old Bailey Law Courts, held supplies of almost everything, from baby foods to Heinz '57 varieties' of soup. London's 'underground' was ready.

When fire-bombs and explosives began to fall night raids would sometimes continue for six or seven hours—fires burning, indeed extending, long after the German planes had left and the 'all clear' sounded. The Bible House itself was twice hit with small fire-bombs, but members of the staff managed to cope. On one of those nights, at 11 p.m., a large explosive bomb fell in front of the building, blowing out the windows in the Bible House and starting intense fires in the vicinity. German planes had left by 4.30 a.m., after more or less swamping the City with fire-bombs, and at 8 a.m. fires were still spreading from the Guildhall in the heart of the City down Queen Victoria Street, and up the same street from Blackfriars, where a paper warehouse was on fire, and lighted sheets of paper swept by the breeze were blowing into buildings through their paneless windows. The Bible House basement shelter had been evacuated, but the building remained otherwise undamaged. At 8 a.m. the Salvation Army International Headquarters, almost opposite, was ablaze, sending out intense heat, but despite this handicap, the Army still continued its public service, for there, in the middle of the blazing street, was a Salvation Army canteen van, with its attendants calmly serving coffee and food to overworked firemen. While the fires were still burning on that eventful morning, the first of the friends of the Bible Society to congratulate us on our escape was the General of the Salvation Army himself, followed by the Vicar of St. Brides, Fleet Street—both of whose buildings had been burnt out . . . Such was the London to which our Trio had returned.

The autumn of 1941 was approaching, and plans for Bible Society meetings were being made on the basis of 'business as usual'—the theme: 'The Christian Gospel in a Divided World'. Out went Mildred and Francesca with a team from the Bible House to Clevedon, Minehead, Torquay, Wells, Penzance, Reading, Hove, Leeds, Halifax, Tunbridge Wells, Bristol and North Wales. They reported: 'In North Wales there was one of the best organised campaigns we have seen. Civil Servants evacuated there came in large numbers to meetings in Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, Rhyl, and for more than a week the towns in that neighbourhood were made aware of the im-

portance of the Christian gospel in our distressed and divided world. Nine pulpits were filled each Sunday: Rotary Clubs, schools, colleges, were visited, in addition to public meetings.' A few months later conferences of key workers followed in North Wales, with exhibitions and films about the Society's world-wide work.

Meanwhile Eva and Topsy remained at the Willow Cottage, and the latter was now the proud possessor of a tiny black kitten. A serious question arose: What should be its name? One of the new gadgets that intrigued Topsy was a zip-fastener, and like thousands of others she never understood how it worked. But it was quick in action, and she wondered if she should call the kitten (which was very frisky) 'Zip'. It was a problem! One of her friends was named Whistler, and when the Trio had passed through Germany Topsy had repeatedly become aware of the name 'Hitler'. By her silent logic she had come to the conclusion that the letters 'ler' at the end of a name gave it some importance — so the name of her new kitten became 'Zipler'.

In London, Mildred and Francesca wrote a circular letter to their ever increasing number of friends, assuring them that they would do all they could to prevent the air-raids interfering with their travels. 'We have spent so many years seeing our plans upset by war lords and brigands, that we are getting used to it. Formerly it was General Ma — now it is Adolf Hitler.'

Later, they were joined in London by Eva, who was now seventy-three, with Topsy, and Edith Wheeler, their friend and the teacher of Topsy, all living together in the Hampstead flat. Each took an active part in the religious life of London. Eva was on a committee of the China Inland Mission, and was Vice-President of the Zenana and Bible Medical Mission. Francesca, two years her junior, was a member of the London Committee of the Indian Ludhiana College and Hospital, and became President of the Girl Crusaders Union. Mildred was on the Board of the Evangelical Union of South America and was an active Vice-President of the Bible Society, being Chairman of its Women's Committee; when the Society's women's work department employed eight full-time women secretaries in various parts of the country. The Trio were now well known as leaders of the Bible Society's circle of voluntary women workers in England and Wales numbering many thousands, who gave time and energy to organising and speaking at meetings and day-conferences. Bombing continued and the black-out interrupted train services, but the Trio held on: Bournemouth, Romford, Salisbury, Bath, Stafford, Chesterfield, Newcastle, Bradford, Manchester, Stockton-on-Tees.

In one heavy London raid the stocks of their book *The Parable of Jade* went up in smoke, when the premises of Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton were hit. Blocks, paper reserves and stocks vanished, and on that same night, Paternoster Row, the booksellers' quarter, disappeared. 'We were in London on the 16th April for the terrible raid,' was all the Three Women said.

Later the same year they returned to Shaftesbury for a break, and their diary notes: 'Mildred was busy with W.V.S. again: Eva greatly humbled herself by looking after the commissariat and ration cards with the hand of a statesman. Francesca continued digging with unabated vigour, and when some Public Schools came to camp in the neighbourhood, she borrowed spades and in the course of a few days, 'Winchester, Charterhouse and Cheltenham were digging for victory too! So it came about that Francesca was able to extend her bed of rhubarb, artichokes and black-currant bushes!

About that time Topsy passed another milestone—she put up her hair. 'Five inches had to come off each plait before she could stand the pull of their braided masses, which became now two firm coils, making her feel quite grown-up.' . . . The Trio were somewhat baffled however, when she tried to explain at their evening prayers that 'Bless Thy little lamb tonight' was no longer suitable. She was trying to tell them that she was no longer a lamb but a sheep—not a girl but a woman: 'a short one, she indicated, but nevertheless, a woman.' 'We received a letter from the woman Superintendent of a girls' Remand Home, telling us that her girls had been impressed with the story of Topsy struggling against her physical disabilities. They had even wondered if she was a real person and if it was true. As a result, Topsy wrote them a letter, and in the end, visited the Home. It did us all good to see her arm-in-arm with the girls.'

Back on the road again, they arrived at Sheffield, with a Bible Society team of speakers representative of Greece, Italy, New Guinea, and including the Bishops of Mombasa and Rangoon, Bishop Haslett of Japan, representatives of Free Churches and the Home Secretary from Bible House. Bishop Haslett greatly moved the meeting by an account of his recent imprisonment by the Japanese, saying that during war-time the Bible had apparently been the only uncensored book in Japan, and on his imprisonment the American Bible Society had presented him with a copy—the only reading matter he was allowed.

At Newcastle-on-Tyne their welcome was fairly typical. It started with a civic reception in the Municipal Art Gallery, and on Sunday

many churches were supplied by a team of speakers. Two thousand people gathered on Monday evening in the City Hall, with the Lord Mayor in the chair. The Trio were impressed. They wrote: 'This is a typical meeting in this campaign.' It was also typical from another point of view. Sitting on the platform was the Bishop of Newcastle, who was also a speaker. He was rather remote from such direct methods of challenge, especially by women speakers, for he was a bachelor and a High Churchman. Mildred was speaking. Slowly he leaned over toward me, and, with a twinkle in his eye, whispered: 'You know, if I were in the Gobi Desert, and Miss Cable asked me to buy a copy of the Gospel—I *think* I would buy one!'

From Sheffield and Tyneside, from Lord Mayors and Bishops, these tireless women went to Tonypandy to speak on behalf of the Salvation Army Home for 'First Offenders', and so impressed were they with the work they saw that letters went out to their friends, pleading for support to extend the Home. Then on again: Woking, Chesterfield, Bristol, Lincoln, Blackpool, Wigan, Leeds: the Central Hall in Liverpool and the Albert Hall in Manchester . . .

One result of all this activity has been that the women's activity in the Bible Society has remained one of the most important factors in women's missionary work in Britain, and it has been a tremendous help in the world-wide work of the Society.

It was 1943. Francesca and Mildred had recently been burning the midnight oil writing their *magnum opus*—*The Gobi Desert*. It was a handsome production, beautifully written, vividly descriptive, and delightfully illustrative of Central Asian conditions. It went into many editions and the Queen herself bought copies as Christmas presents that year. Later Her Majesty invited the Trio to Buckingham Palace to meet her and to show her their photographs. They were greatly moved to be so honoured.

Then: 'We are to receive, most surprisingly, the Lawrence of Arabia Medal of the Royal Central Asian Society: Mrs. Lawrence and her son, Dr. Lawrence, are to be at the presentation. In December, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society are to present us with the Livingstone Medal—but at the moment, Mildred is off once more to Tonypandy and the Salvation Army; then we go to Rowntree Clifford's West Ham settlement and Old People's Home . . . Whenever Topsy sees a Salvation Army Colonel or Major, her face lights up and her ardent desire is one day to meet the General himself . . .'

Late, in June 1944, the war came even nearer to them. Their Hampstead home was hit. 'Many of you will have heard,' they

wrote later to some of the closer friends, 'that we have had a direct hit from one of Hitler's doodle-bugs. At 2 a.m. we were fast asleep, then suddenly Eva found herself buried in rubble, to be brought out by the A.R.P. with cuts and bruises. Francesca's head was bruised when the door of her bedroom landed on top of her. Mildred's belongings were scattered. She could find no shoes and had to walk out of her room with bare feet over a mass of broken glass. Edith Wheeler escaped without injury, and Topsy was away attending a wedding, but her empty bedroom collapsed and, indeed, ceased to exist. Some of our neighbours and friends were killed.'

Back again in London, at a new Hampstead address—12a, West End Lane: 'We have been greatly amused to hear that this flat was No. 13, but superstition changed it to 12a. We asked the owner for the correct number to be restored. With a little patched-up furniture, some second-hand pieces, and a few things from the Cottage, we expect soon to be able to make a respectable show again. Our techniques of tent-life stand us in good stead, although all Mildred's files and folders were blasted and broadcast down the street . . . We hear of a local fishmonger whose shop was also hit by a bomb. Next day he erected his fish-stall in the open street—with a *feather in his hat!*'

30—TO THE ANTIPODES AND INDIA

IN March 1945 the Student Christian Movement published a manuscript which had given the Trio great joy in writing. It was a series of testimonies to the power of the translated Gospel in various parts of the world: *The Book which Demands a Verdict*. 'So you will see that we have not been idle in our odd moments,' they wrote to friends. But the burden of their journeying to meetings, the growing correspondence and their other activities were beginning to tell on their health. Eva, who did not travel nearly so much as the other two, had already taken an enforced holiday. Francesca and Mildred were both very tired. 'Packed trains, often delayed; long hours at stations; standing in queues; foodless journeys; despite all the trouble our gracious hostesses have taken to provide us with meals late at night . . . We remember with gratitude the travelling mercies and the love which has been showered upon us.'

About this time the Bible Society in New Zealand was planning to celebrate its Centenary, and in Australia it was arranging special meetings of the 'Commonwealth Council'. At the London Bible

House we felt that a seatrip would repay something of the debt which we owed to these women, as well as providing for our friends in the Antipodes a welcome stimulation in their work. So off to Australia they went. In view of the special Australian occasion I, too, was to visit that Dominion. When, after weeks at sea, the Trio arrived in Perth, Western Australia, I was twelve hundred miles away in Sydney, but the Press throughout the country rose warmly to the occasion by giving descriptive accounts of the work of the Grey Lady (Eva), the Blue Lady (Mildred), and the Brown Lady (Francesca) — names by which they had been known long ago in China. Information concerning their Gobi travels, and, of course, their books, had preceded them. Their popularity in both Dominions was remarkable, particularly amongst the already wide circle of Bible Society friends and supporters of the China Inland Mission. A few years later they were to add to their list of publications a book entitled *Journey with a Purpose*, which was a description of this particular visit.

With something of the charm and wonder of children, they thrilled to all they saw and, as ever, they had gone well prepared by wide reading concerning the lands they were visiting. They had left behind a wintry England of food queues, to arrive in a sunny Australia of full shops and plentiful fruit supplies. Above all, they were amongst a warm-hearted people — still collecting money for food parcels for Britain. For the Trio, as for others who visited Australia or New Zealand at this time, it was a moving experience — never to be forgotten.

Melbourne: 'The day after our arrival, Mildred preached in the Scots Church; Francesca occupied another pulpit, and on the following day, we both attended the Presbyterian General Assembly.' Once the ice was broken, meetings began to pile up: names like Kew, Richmond, Malvern, Croydon, Canterbury (all suburbs of Melbourne) came in quick succession and with some surprise. Indeed, the familiarity of names and places was confusing.

'Where did you preach this morning?' someone asked Mildred.

'At the Anglican Church in Tobruk,' she replied, with memories of the war.

'*Tobruk?*' queried the Australian. 'That's in North Africa — not Australia.'

'Oh, I am sorry: I meant Toorak,' (a suburb of Melbourne) came a rather meek reply.

At Adelaide the temperature rose to 81 degrees, so die-hard Eva — the toughest of them all — decided to abandon her fur coat! It was a

good thing, for Queensland was hotter still. But after the English winter, these Australian days proved a real paradise for the Trio. 'We were entertained most kindly: in the cool evenings with friends we sat around wide hearths where wood fires blazed; we slept, dreamless hours on their covered verandas, and ate meals careless of any ration restrictions.' Bishops, even Archbishops and Lord Mayors, entertained them, but they could never forget the Salvation Army Citadels or close their eyes to the beauties of the Australian landscape. Tall wattles, yellow myrtles, distant blue mountains, were as fascinating to them as the koala, the platypus, the kookaburra, the aborigines and the 'flying doctor'. On the Women's World Day of Prayer women came many miles along desert roads from distant outbacks to hear the story of the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth in the Gobi Desert, and to pray for Malays, Mongols, Tibetans, Chinese, Indians, Japanese—all Asian neighbours of the two 'White Dominions'.

'It was grand,' they wrote of their meetings: 'Anglicans, high and low, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Brethren—all were there. New Australians and old, British, Chinese, New Zealanders, Indians, gathered in a common cause and in one family.' To their mind, this was true catholicity, and it is worth recording that they had spent long hours on their outward sea-trip discussing with an Irish Roman Catholic priest the points of contact between their respective beliefs. In the end, and with good humour, he had given these Three Women his blessing as they continued on what he called their 'tin-pot way'! Nevertheless, if they were faithful, he had told them, in the end they would be 'all right' . . . But in some of the smaller towns they had found it depressing that, in addition to the 'well-known variety of isms', there would be Seventh Day Adventists, Four Squarers, Jehovah's Witnesses, and, a new variety they had never heard of, the 'Cooneyites' . . .

For them first impressions of a new country were important, as indeed they are for all of us the most vivid and dramatic. Sometimes, indeed, they go to the root of the matter. On the other hand conclusions based on them may lack depth, as they did for the Trio. In New Zealand, for instance, they were thrilled with the equality given to the Maoris in the national life of the Dominion, but it was surely mistaken for the Trio later to compare the tolerance of the New Zealand attitude to colour with conditions in South Africa, overlooking the basic fact that it is not colour which is the problem in race relations but *power*. When the majority of the population in a settled society is either overwhelmingly white, as in New Zealand, or overwhelmingly black, as in West Africa, there is no real race

problem, so long as power vests with the majority. Wherever power is vested in minorities, or when there is dispute over power in an evenly divided population, the trouble begins. Nor do such problems concern only the white races. Malaya, Guiana, Fiji have acute non-white race questions.

Auckland and its sea-scapes, Rotorua with its thermal springs. Gisburne and its tree-ferns, were seen on their way to Napier—that pleasant little ‘Eastbourne’ rebuilt after its earthquake. In these and many another New Zealand centre people crowded to hear the Trio in the largest Bible Society meetings the Dominion had ever seen . . . Eva was not a great speaker, and sometimes was strangely shy, but when she arrived in Wellington to find there a Chinese church with a Chinese congregation she was thrilled to be able to talk to them in their mother-tongue. At Christchurch, in the South Island, friends of the China Inland Mission gathered around them, Mildred preaching in the Cathedral. In Dunedin later, it was, of course, the First Presbyterian Church which drew them . . . Then on for a break, to the Franz Josef glacier, which they never forgot: the little church with its altar-window and its Cross overlooking majestic mountain peaks.

Flying back to Sydney they were amused when a customs officer questioned them closely about a Tibetan prayer-wheel which they had been showing at their meetings.

‘Was it dutiable or not?’

‘Had they earned any money in New Zealand?’

‘Was their business legitimate? What was it?’

‘Had they declared *all* their currency?’ . . .

Little did the customs officer—or the public—know that these women received no salary at all from the Bible Society—only their travel expenses, or that, during their long years in China, they had provided their own support from family resources, royalties on their books, or from close friends who offered help in the work.

On the way home they visited India, to see the Christian College at Ludhiana, where in forty-two years 309 Indian doctors, 203 nurses, 148 dispensers, and 600 midwives had been trained; in which Francesca had been particularly interested, and about which she was later to write a book. In Bombay they stayed at the Queen Mary Girls’ School, with five hundred scholars; in Nasik, at the Canadian Hospital, later visiting C.M.S. and S.P.G. and Salvation Army work . . .

After the wide open spaces of the Gobi the overcrowding and squalor of some of the Indian cities seemed to daunt and depress them, though at Ludhiana they talked of the beauty of India's daughters—their dignity, colourful saris and Punjabi shawls—in terms which were reminiscent of remarks they had made concerning the tall Moslem women of Kashgar. But how different were India and China!

Christianity in India had gathered to itself mass-movements of poor village people, with few outstanding leaders of public life. In China it had drawn some of its most distinguished followers from the educated and even ruling classes. The background of life in the two countries differed considerably. The discipline of Confucianism and Buddhism—both agnostic—seemed to have left a spiritual vacuum which ancestor-worship and animism endeavoured to fill. In India—a deeply religious land—Hinduism rarely seemed to reject incoming religions, but becoming a kind of pantheistic pantehnicon, gathered to itself over the centuries every variety of belief.

Ardent evangelists though they were, the Trio held in great respect all religious belief and worship, and they were particularly impressed with the Golden Temple of the Sikhs at Amritsar. Greatly moved, they took off their shoes as they reached the lakeside. They wrote: 'Many Sikhs enter the Temple sword in hand, like the warrior-race they are.' Themselves people of discipline and action, the Trio understood the clear-cut Sikh religion, and were deeply impressed. 'There were no idols in the Temple,' they wrote, 'only symbolic offerings and worship of a book.'

The memory of those Indian crowds, the congestion of many of the cities, lingered with them for a very long time. Mildred did not quite expect one incident which occurred on the night train, however. Locked in her sleeping compartment, she was awakened in the middle of the night on their way to Benares by 'a strange man sitting at the foot of her bed, smoking, and half a dozen youngsters standing round him'. They had cut out a piece from the protective wire-netting of the compartment, opened the door and just walked in!—part of India's millions who could not find room. One wonders whether (in writing back to Australia to friends with whom they had stayed) they ever drew the moral: 'Remember, Australia, the millions in Asia who cannot find a place to settle.'

On they went to Nagpur, to a Bible Society conference, where India's spiritual hunger was discussed; to Dr. Robert Cochrane at Vellore, and his leprosy work; back to the Zenana Medical

Mission; and to the Hindu widow Homes at Gorakhpur . . . Then on again and again to encourage and to have fellowship with isolated workers manning the thin red line of Christian service and compassion.

India and China: the contrast between them still stands today. Both countries believe, as we all do, in planning. But there are degrees: the one dictatorial and total; the other permitting a large measure of freedom, toleration and non-conformity. China represents the first and India the second.

'India is moving, and we may soon see great things happening,' the Trio wrote on their return to Britain. Less than a year later, in 1947, India became a self-governing republic.

It was good for their own thinking and for their advocacy that they should see India, for these two Asian lands represent the main choice and challenge which face our world. Both are main centres of what we call the 'population explosion'—one in every four people in the world is Chinese; one in every six is Indian. In each of them one man in every three is living on or below the subsistence level. Ignorance, poverty, disease, landlordism face both, but each is today tackling its vast problems differently.

In 1947, Mahatma Gandhi, who had once confessed that he owed more to Jesus of Nazareth than to any other person, was leader of India. In 1949, Mao Tse Tung, with Marx as his ideal, was leader of China. Similar problems, but two different types of men, with contrasting ideologies.

With all their love of China, for the rest of their lives the Trio became greatly interested in work in India, Mildred and Francesca being on the London Board of the Ludhiana Women's Medical College. The Trio realised, too, something of the parallel struggle in these two Asian lands. Today, we see even more of it.

After ten years of Communism in China, her national income was said to be up by 100 per cent. In India, by her method, it had risen by only 42 per cent in 1960—which just about permits India to keep pace with her increase in population. In China, no one is asked whether work is being pressed too hard. In India a balance must always be struck between personal freedom and State planning. The difference in approach is vital for humanity. Barbara Ward, the economist, sets the drama in her book: *India and the West*. 'Fuse the tiny plots into single units, line the peasants into farm labourers, or join them in gangs for sowing, harvest, draining and irrigating channels; control the supplies of fertilisers and seed; put effective

farm technicians to manage the unit . . . and remove as much of the surplus as possible . . . with the ruthlessness of the Communist in China . . . and the result does seem to solve rural stagnation in one mighty act.' But politically and personally, the cost is enormous. Peasants pay for the change in sweat and tears and blood. Yet even then, the case for total control is not proven economically, for long-term results and effects of dictatorship on a population are uncertain, and in little Japan, this ideology of control as well as the economic theory break down. 'No country in Asia approaches the productivity of Japan where it is based on very small peasant proprietors using the most modern farming techniques and backed by a full range of co-operative services.'

Today, India is a voluntary society: to follow China she would need to become a different kind of country.

Now, all this has a bearing, not only on our own world today, but also on the story we have told of the spread of the Gospel in China. 'In their attitude to the ultimate purpose of society; in their belief in the rights and dignity of ordinary citizens, and the subordinate role of the government as servant not master of the people; in their deep dedication to persuasion, conciliation, and non-violence as the only legitimate means of politics, Indian values continue to produce an open, plural, mixed society. In a word, the two versions of society which have divided the West in the last hundred years now divide Asia as well. China is dedicated to the one; India to the other.'* On the outcome of the respective struggles in these two nations will depend the future of Asia . . . On the basis of the first ten years (1951-61) of trial and error in both countries, China may seem to have pulled ahead economically—but Asians do not ignore the cost in human terms. The price may be too high. Meanwhile, China is a closed land. India is open and free. Africa and Latin America watch the drama and wonder about their own freedom and the multitudes of their own population still living in poverty. Where will the levers of power finally rest: with the Lenins or the Woodrow Wilsons of the distant Geneva days; the Stalins or Gandhis of our own? Does man need to lose his freedom to feed himself?

In the meantime, what about us? Where do we stand?

'Behind the statistics lie the realities of children without bread, men without work, women without hope. If these do not move us to action, the outer form of our society may survive but its inner spirit will have withered away . . . It is our fortune (in the West) at this point of crisis to have all the physical resources that are needed

* Barbara Ward, *India and the West*, Hamish Hamilton.

to create a new world of opportunity . . . It is our tragedy that we may lack the vision and the will.’*

‘Only a fully integrated man with spiritual depth and moral strength will be able to meet the challenge of the new times . . .’ said Pandit Nehru.†

31 — ‘THE WORK OF THE HUMBLE’

*‘The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.
In all my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.
Forgetful, you neglect your shrines and churches;
The men you are in these times decide
What has been done of good, you find explanations
To satisfy the rational and enlightened mind.
Second, you neglect and belittle the desert.
The desert is not remote in southern tropics,
The desert is not only around the corner,
The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
The desert is in the heart of your brother.
The good man is the builder, if he build what is good.
I will show you the things that are now being done,
And some of the things that were long ago done,
That you may take heart. Make perfect your will.
Let me show you the work of the humble. Listen.’*

WORKMEN are heard chanting:

*‘In the vacant places
We will build with new bricks
There are hands and machines
And clay for new brick . . .*

*Where the word is unspoken
We will build with new speech
There is work together
A Church for all
And a job for each
Every man to his work.’*

* *Ibid.*, p. 237.

† R. K. Karanjia, *The Mind of Mr. Nehru*, Allen & Unwin.

So wrote T. S. Eliot in a poem entitled 'The Rock'.* A copy lies before me in a volume of his poems called *The Waste Land*, and pasted inside the cover is a letter from Mildred Cable to the pretty girl who was secretary to her throughout the years of the London blitz and during her service to the Bible Society. Miss Cable wrote:

'My dear little Maria,

This brings you very much love and all good wishes for your birthday . . . You know all I would say and you must read into this all pen and paper do not say . . .

All the family joins me in good wishes.

Yours affectionately,

Mildred Cable.'

Maria was Austrian, petite, charming, devoted, shrewd, intelligent. Before she came to Britain, she had lost most of her family by British bombs in the war.

'I never minded giving all I had,' she told me, 'for she gave herself and all she had . . .'

When the Bible Society Women's Work was taking shape in Britain, Maria came to help Mildred Cable, who at that time was jokingly known by others in the London Bible House as 'Napoleon'. She would have enjoyed the joke. But Maria knew another side — indeed, another side to each of the Three Women. Even today, when she talks of Miss Cable her eyes light up. When she speaks of Eva she laughs. When she quietly talks of Francesca her voice is wistful.

But first, a further glimpse of Mildred. 'When she wanted to say something very personal to you,' Maria says to me, 'maybe a criticism or a bit of advice, or even a word of affection, she would take your hand firmly in hers, hold it, and pull it towards her. Looking into your eyes she would speak quietly, gently . . . Sometimes, when she was touched by some little service rendered to her, she would squeeze your hand, saying simply: "Thanks, I could *hug* you for it." Yet speaking to a crowd of young deaconesses on the day her own brother had died (of which they did not know), she told them: "Never wallow in your own troubles".'

Maria would book her train tickets, see her off. Maria would meet her coming back, too. By 1950 Mildred's mail was running into many hundreds of personal letters a year — but never a letter went unanswered. Before a train pulled out of Euston or King's Cross, Paddington or Waterloo, you would see Maria sitting in the corner

* *Collected Poems 1909-1962* Faber & Faber.

of a compartment writing: Mildred opposite, dictating. Then they would separate, Mildred and Francesca to a meeting or conference or lecture about Central Asia; Maria to the Bible House or to Eva and Topsy at the flat in Hampstead, or to do some library research for the Trio's next book. 'One could not be long in contact with Miss Cable', Maria would say 'before discovering many qualities which are recognised as Christ-like'. Now she herself is a Vicar's wife with a family of her own. She adds: 'You know, there was something of steel in her combined with a deep and loving concern for others. How often did she scold others for over-working. Never did she speak of the strain of her own labours. Her hands were delicate and small, of fine bone-structure, but her hand-shake had something compelling. She never spared herself. She slept badly, but her programme would always be carried out. Her two companions were ever anxious about her. Strangely enough, she was rather shy, yet she could speak with authority and hold a large audience. In travelling, she insisted on Third Class, and would laugh heartily if anyone suggested "First". If there had been a "Fourth" class she would have been in it. Choosing "what to wear" was a trial to her, but she made time for hasty and serious sessions with dressmaker or milliner. She was well dressed. Her favourite colour was blue—*Chinese* blue. The Chinese called her 'The Blue Lady', and China was ever in her thought and speech. Indeed, all Three by now were as Chinese as they were British.'

But there was still another Mildred—a silent, mature person, almost childlike in her humility—and a bit remote. Then she would sometimes talk with confidence about God and the future life; what it might be like living nearer to her Creator. At those times she would appear to be listening—almost seeking advice. This was the Mildred who walked in the early morning or late evening; to and fro, beneath the trees, over the little patch of green grass she had herself laid in the garden of the Willow Cottage. That was the threshold of her Temple—the place of a gentle stillness . . .

People visiting the Three Women at the Cottage were often surprised at the utter simplicity of their rooms. People wondered too about their family life. Mildred, actually the youngest, was certainly the 'father figure', Francesca was mother to them all, and Eva, the eldest in years, was puckish, utterly frank, always unpredictable, sometimes mischievous, quite unsentimental—the 'naughty boy' of the family. Long ago Francesca had glimpsed something of the understanding and deep attachment between Eva, her sister, and Mildred, the inseparable Two. She had never really resented it and had so

disciplined herself that not even by the flicker of an eyelid had she ever revealed that she knew how much they meant to each other — indeed, how much the enthusiastic Mildred needed the sceptical Eva. So in China and in Shaftesbury the wheels turned smoothly, for the other Two needed Francesca, the detached, dependable, calm, rather cautious one. Who was it saw to the household chores? who polished up Mildred's prose when authorship came their way? who tinted Eva's lantern slides of their travels, and coloured in her rough landscape sketches? Of course, it was Francesca. She almost worshipped her 'big sister', but had learned the happy and indispensable art of playing good second fiddle. She was Mary and Martha rolled in one, something of a saint, in fact, though she had undoubtedly clear-cut views of her own — (had not Chesterton once called her a heretic?). The other two had been colleagues before her arrival on the China scene, so there was only one role Francesca could fill unless the partnership was to break up. Selflessly, she had to bind them closer together still, and in so doing, humility and personal discipline were essential. The reward was full and affectionate partnership in the Trio team. It was Francesca, then, who made the Three into One. Her full name was Francesca Law French, and it was not for nothing that she was a descendant of William Law, who two hundred years before had written: *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Probably she was the most intelligent of the Three, as she was also the most cultured.

And what, again, of Eva, with whom we started this story? As we have seen, she was the 'character' of the family, dry, gawky, vigorous, righteous — and deeply attached to Topsy, with whom in later years she spent long hours and many days while the other two were away at meetings. Yet there was more to it than that. Eva's 'Grace' at meal-times, her family prayers at bed-time, showed a spiritual maturity, solidity and depth of soul which she often endeavoured to cover up. She felt deeply, and knew the limitation of her temperament. In her prayers (someone remarked) it was evident that she was 'in touch'. They were marked by a dependence, an underlying confidence and finality which came from long and utter committal to God's Will. Deep down was spiritual rock. Whenever Eva talked of the deeper things, or taught a group, her illustrations were never abstract or theoretical, they were direct, arising from life itself.

All Three Women had learned much from China: its stony roads, its bitter desert, its long silences, detached Confucianism, and perhaps most of all from the timeless patience of its common people

—particularly the long-suffering women whom they had gone there to live with. It had been a two-way traffic. The Trio had given what they had to give, and no one can do more. But they had also received. In the end, meekness does inherit the earth, for it cannot be defeated.

Yet with all this, one of the striking things about the Three was their zest for life; their joy in living, which came of a freedom learned (paradoxically) in obedience and in reliance on that Other-than-self. They found God to be at the *centre* of things. They had been involved in life long, deeply, and often in such odd circumstances, relying completely on the Unknown within themselves and in their environment that, finding it had worked out right, they were now rooted and grounded in the fact of God's Care. It was in actual life and living that they had found *Reality*. Their religion was an experience. It was a way of life even more than a creed. Life was lived in God, and it was in life that He met them—in the day's relationships and hazards. Every step forward was adventure into the unknown.

Two of the Three were now in their seventies, but they were full of fun. It was a happy, satisfying life. See them, for instance, at a Swanwick Conference of three hundred women during the social hour after supper, parodying for the entertainment of the others the kind of meeting they were sometimes invited to address. No hymns had been chosen; the pianist had not turned up; in any case, the piano was locked. 'Madam Chairman', whose *pince nez* kept slipping off, was a local celebrity, who was not quite sure what the meeting was about. Was it a baby-show or a get-together of the wives of the British Legion? Last of all, when it had been stressed that the meeting was on behalf of the Bible Society, there was not a Bible to be found for the Scripture reading. (Having been present at such a *charade*, I shall long remember the shrieks of laughter as the moral got home: 'Plan well: prepare in detail.') Even when they were alone laughter never seemed to be far away. In their Hampstead flat Eva stepped into the middle of a large cream-cake placed in a hurry (by her, of course) on the floor—and forgotten! Hear her tell the story of her visit to Burberry's in the Haymarket to buy a new 'mac'. With a straight face she seriously asks the astonished assistant how much he will allow her on her (very) old one in part exchange—just as she would have done in China! After the blitz, when their house had been hit and the other two had hunted high and low for the manuscript of *The Gobi Desert*, on which they had spent long months of research and labour, they finally found it stuck in the

waste-paper basket ready for the fire! . . . Eva was incalculable. Learning, much to their distress, that one of their acquaintances had got a divorce, amid frowns from the other two, Eva remarked: 'Well, just fancy what it must be like having to live with *one* man all your life!'

In 1949 Mildred came to tell me that they had been invited by the Evangelical Union of South America, on whose London Committee she served, to visit the scattered and often lonely missionaries and their Christian congregations in that continent. What did I think about it? She was not too well, but finally, after admonitions to 'go slowly', and after consulting her doctor, they went—as we all knew they would. It was a thrilling experience, for amongst other things, the father of Eva and Francesca had lived in Chile before his marriage. But it was an exhausting trip, though the sea journey home was restful and enjoyable. The nurse on the ship had been trained at a mission teaching hospital which they had just visited, which in training its staff also treated twenty-five thousand patients a year. On the way, Topsy won the first prize at the ship's fancy-dress ball, and the Trio were greatly amused to see her walking round the ship arm-in-arm with the Captain—much to her own delight and that of the passengers, who had taken her to their hearts. The first prize was a box of face-powder and some lip-stick!

Many features of South America impressed them—the widespread circulation of the Scriptures and literature by the American and British Bible Societies and the World Literature Crusade, the phenomenal growth in the Evangelical Churches, and the fact that Brazil was solving its colour problem by ignoring it. But they were appalled by the stark contrast between the rich and the poor; the luxury hotels and sky-scrapers of the big cities, compared with the poverty, filth and squalor of the shanty-towns built on the hillsides around them, where one in every four babies died, and half the population was illiterate. Towering above the lovely city of Rio and on the mountain overlooking it, stood a colossal and compassionate figure of Jesus—in stark, silent challenge . . . The Trio came away to add South America to their list of 'neglected continents' where the economic potential was as enormous as the spiritual and material condition of the common people was abysmal. 'But, let no one go out to start another mushroom mission!' they wrote. 'In Brazil there are too many of these already, organised by cranks who fail to get on with their fellow-workers and so start a one-man concern where they themselves are both Head and Tail.' They agreed with

C. H. Dodd* that Christians must be a sort of Divine Commonwealth—‘a community of loving persons who bear one another’s burdens, who seek to build up one another in love, who have the same thoughts in relation to one another that they have in their communion with Christ,’ and this sort of thing had no meaning apart from loving fellowship in real service—no matter how lofty the faith, or how deep the mystical experience.

When they returned home, that figure of Christ, illuminated at night and standing in the sky above the glitter of Rio and the squalor of its surrounding slums, was still haunting them. In June 1951 they wrote to friends in words almost reminiscent of John Bunyan: ‘Seemingly inaccessible is the mighty Figure of Christ which dominates the harbour from the mountain-top, yet once started on that steep ascent, by the clever devices of the engineer, one can come by a good road to the place where only a long flight of stone steps divides one from the very pedestal on which the Figure stands . . .’ And surely, here they intended us to see a parable: the technology of the modern age has made it possible for men of Christian heart to meet Christ in satisfying the colossal hunger for fuller life of under-developed lands. ‘There are two camps,’ they had written to some of their young friends.† ‘Every human being is in one or other of them . . . You can be with Christ or you can be against Him, but there is no middle way. No man can serve two masters . . . If the older generation seems to you to have largely failed in making of the Church the effective force which she should be, as a member of the younger generation, you have your chance today.’

Nine months later, Mildred’s life on earth came to a close. Amid their grief, Francesca quietly wrote to friends: ‘We had recently returned from a journey in South America and she was certainly tired, for the tour had made heavy demands on her strength . . .

‘Had Mildred been asked which was the supreme event of her life, she would unquestionably have declared it to be the demand of God to yield her life to Him, and her answer to it . . . That transaction belonged to her girlhood, and her twenty-second birthday found her in China . . . Was her death to be the end? No, rather the beginning, for the Hand of God can never lead those who follow to anything but life, growth, expansion and attainment beyond human imagining.’

At the funeral service Eva was clad in Grey, Francesca in Brown,

* *The Meaning of Paul for Today*, Collins.

† *What it Means to be a Christian*.

for the passing of the Blue Lady. The flowers sent by London women from the Bible House were Chinese blue in colour. Her ashes lie scattered to the four winds of the world she had tried to serve, and in the service we recalled the buoyant, compelling figure we knew so well, telling a crowd of young people about China, or India, or Latin America. 'You are young doctors,' she would say. Or, 'You are young nurses.' Or, 'You are teachers,' or 'You are an engineer—members of a younger generation. What will you *do*?' . . .

Some years later Eva had a serious illness—she was over ninety. She and Francesca, who was eighty-eight, were at the Willow Cottage. Francesca, was sleeping throughout the night on the floor, to be beside her sick sister. 'I've been sleeping on the floor all my life—it's nothing,' she remarked indignantly to a friend who remonstrated with her.

Francesca was the last to go. Edith Wheeler and Topsy brought her from the Cottage to Hampstead, where, three weeks after Eva, we gathered again this time to say '*Vale*' to dear Francesca. We quoted what we thought to be appropriate for our Trio, some lines from an old Greek hymn:

*'Joyful words at parting spoken
Be it to our friends a token
Of a bond of love—unbroken.'*

When the Joint Will and Testament of the Three Women was made known, their possessions and the royalties from their books were to be held in trust, with the income available, for the little Mongolian *ya ba* they had adopted in Suchow and left behind in London. When Topsy has no longer any need, the residue will be divided between their beloved British and Foreign Bible Society, whose Gospels never failed them, and to which they gave more than a dozen years of their lives, and the Salvation Army—whose social gospel they so greatly loved.

ADDENDUM FROM MY RECENT MAIL

Letter One

'It must require some effort of will to remain a Christian in China today. Those who wish to get ahead must renounce their Christianity. High posts are reserved generally for Party members . . . All the same, there are examples of people who refuse to renounce their faith . . . According to the Chinese constitution, "all citizens of the People's Republic enjoy freedom of religious belief . . .", which seems to be true in its narrowest sense. . .

'A Russian Orthodox Church still functions on the edge of the Soviet Embassy compound in Peking, though the large enclosure occupied by the Embassy used to be the premises of the Russian Orthodox Mission, which was the first permanent Foreign Mission in Peking. The priests are Chinese—some of them quite young. The journal of the Moscow Patriarchate is still on sale.

'The Catholic Southern Cathedral in Peking still functions, as does the Church on Morrison Street, where the Services are well attended and include a fair sprinkling of young people, who sometimes turn up in their "Young Pioneer" red scarves. The main Protestant Church is in the old Y.M.C.A. building . . .'

Letter Two

'In spite of ten thousand setbacks, the Church is still alive. In the cities, Sunday morning services are regularly held. A Theological Faculty, well filled with students, both men and women, carries on in Nanking . . .

'On 16th April, 1963, the *Chinese News-Agency* published in England and in fifty other countries a cablegram which read: "Catholics and Protestants in Shanghai gathered in cathedrals and churches today for the Easter Sunday services to mark the resurrection of Jesus Christ. High Mass was celebrated at Zikawei Cathedral, and the congregation sang in unison "Alleluia". Easter Holy Communion was observed at the biggest Protestant Church in the city. The Protestants took bread and wine, symbolising the flesh and blood of Christ. Visitors from other countries now in Shanghai also took part in the celebration of Easter . . ."'

'Peking. Dec. 24th 1963: Christmas Eve was observed among the Christians here by prayer, carols, candle-light services and tinsel decorated fir-trees at the churches tonight. Catholics thronged churches for midnight Mass. At the Mi-shih Street church and other

churches, Protestants observed Holy Communion services. Christmas festivities will continue on Christmas Day, tomorrow.'

Letter Three

This brings me a copy of *The Wall has Two Sides*. Felix Greene, the author, after counting five hundred and forty people present in a Church, where half the congregation was under forty, the singing fervent, and a young priest, assisted by a man in working clothes, in charge, remarks: 'The Church was alive.'

He further describes a conversation with a young Chinese whom he met at a concert:

'What do you think is the alternative to the present régime?' asks Greene.

'I do not think there is one,' came the reply. 'This régime historically was inevitable.'

'What is your personal hope?' asks Greene.

'That it may change in time. Russia has changed . . .'

The Way Ahead (Recap. from Page 95)

'Ricci had seen that Christianity could never succeed in China as an exotic: it must adapt itself . . . graft itself . . . love the totally other, without losing identity.'

W. J. P.

INDEX

- Aberystwyth University, 190
Adelaide, 197
Afghanistan, 14, 151
Africa, 93, 202
Alexander I, 70, 72
Allen, Roland, 186
Altai Mountains, 72, 146
Altyn Tagh, 133
American Bible Society, 194
Amritsar, 200
Anglo-Chinese College, 21
Ansi, 80, 81, 118, 119, 132, 140, 143,
164, 165, 166
Aramaic, 133, 138
Aristotle, 69
Armenia, 95
Ashanti, 137
Astrid (Queen), 176
Atlas Mountains, 12
Auckland, 199
Australia, 'Commonwealth Council',
196, 197, 198
Axebrod, 11
- Baber, 94
Baboon Pass, 170
Baikal, Lake, 73
Bangkok, 93
Baptist Missionary Society, 187
Barkul, 161, 184
Barth, Karl, 11
Bath, 193
Baxti, 178
Beauchamp, Sir Ivor, 185
Belgium, 12, 176
Berlin, 174, 176
Beust, 11
Bible House, 191, 192, 194, 196, 210
Bible Society 'Women's Work', 204
Bismarck, 14
Blackpool, 195
Black River, 86
Black Sea, 75
Bombay Queen Mary Girls' School, 199
Bondfield, Dr., 73
Book which Demands a Verdict, The,
196
Borden Memorial Hospital, 78, 126
Borodin, 61
Borrow, George, 72, 73, 74, 84, 152
Botany Bay, 71
Boxer Rising, 22, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31,
33, 60, 66, 174
Bournemouth, 193
Bradford, 193
Brahmi, Asian, 138
Brazil, 208
Bristol, 190, 192, 195
British and Foreign Bible Society, 21,
72, 73, 89, 104, 109, 112, 178, 190,
193, 195, 210
British East India Company, 20
British Museum, 139
Broderick, Alan, 175
Bruges, 12
Brussels, 142, 156, 176
Buckingham Palace, 195
Buddhism, 38, 65, 93, 200
Burma, 93
Buryats, 71, 72
- Calais, 176
Calvin, John, 11
Camul, 149, 150
Cantlie, Dr., 22
Canton, 21, 30, 61, 95
Canute, King, 189
Cap Gris Nez, 176
Carey, William, 103
Catherine of Braganza, 17
Caxton Hall, 190
Chang, Deacon, 142

- Chang Chin, 75
 Chaocheng, 37
 Charles II, 17
 Cheo Hsin Mao, 28
 Chesterfield, 193, 195
 Chesterton, G. K., 67, 206
 Chiang Kai Shek, 60, 61, 62, 83, 164, 180
 Chiang Lao, 28
 Chikinpu, 142
 China Inland Mission, 23, 31, 33, 41, 50, 64, 73, 74, 81, 82, 152, 157, 180, 187, 190, 193, 197
 Chinese Evangelism Society, 64
 Chinese Home Missionary Society, 187
 Chinghai, 57
 Chiuchuan, 92
 Chou Chi Ch'eng, 28
 Chou En Lai, 16
 Christchurch, N.Z., 199
 Chuguchak, 154, 182
 Cicero, 69
 Citröen Asian Expedition, 168
 Clevedon, 192
 C.M.S., 199
 Cobbett, 32
 Cochrane, Dr. Robert, 200
 Colum, Padraig, 12
 Colwyn Bay, 192
 Communist Party, 61, 62, 151, 178, 180, 187, 201
 Condor, Charles, 12
 Confucianism, 38, 41, 49, 63, 200
 Council of Peoples' Commissars, 180
 Crescent Moon, Lake of, 81, 138, 139, 168
 Cronin, Vincent, 95
 Croydon B.F.B.S., 190
 Crusader Groups, 190
 Cyril, 69

 Davidman, Joy, 85
 Dalai Lama, 88
 Dentsol, 11
Desert Journal, A, 175
 Dewey, John, 61
 Dickens, Charles, 17
 Dodd, C. H., 209
 Dong Shi, 96
 Dorchester, 190
 Dorset, 174, 190, 191
 Dostoevsky, 15, 19
 Dover, 176
 Drew, W. J., 180
 Dublin, 12, 44
 Dulles, 16
 Dunedin, N.Z., 199
 Dunkirk, 191
 Durham University, 190

 Ecole Secondaire, Geneva, 12
 Edinburgh, 157
 Eileen Guy, 132
 Eliot, T. S., 204
 Emperor of China, 21, 38, 59
 Empress Dowager, 21, 22, 29, 31
 England, 17, 18, 157, 176
 Evangelical Union of South America, 193, 208

 Fan, Old Granny, 129, 131
 Farndon, 12
 Fen, River, 36
 Feng Yu Hsiang, 60, 124, 125, 126, 151, 163
 Fensi, 37
 Fischbacher, Dr. Emil, 178, 179, 185
 Fleetwood, 152, 179
 Fleming, Peter, 9, 180, 184
 Flowing Water Oasis, 171
Forbidden Journey, 164, 184
 Foster, Professor John, 94, 95
 France, 20
 Franco-German War, 14
 Francois of France, 176
 Franz Josef Glacier, 199
 French, Elizabeth, 12, 44
 French, George Erington, 12
 French, John Erington, 12, 17
 French, Nora, 12, 17
 Fuji, 90

 Gandhi, Mahatma, 201, 202
 Galitzin, 70
 Gautama-Buddha, Prince, 139
 Geneva, 11, 14, 15, 16, 155
 Germany, 176, 177, 193
 Ghengis Khan, 75
 Gibbon, 11
 Gill, Eric, 50

- Girl Crusaders Union, 193
 Gisburne, N.Z., 199
 Glover, Dr. T. R., 93, 159
 Gobi Desert, 34, 46, 68, 71, 92, 116,
 124, 146, 159, 169, 174, 195
 Gorakhpur, Hindu Widow Homes, 201
 Gorchakov, 11
 Great Spring, 170
 Great Wall, 75, 79
 Greece, 69
 Greene, Felix, 212
 Grenfell, 175
 Guildford, 32, 33
 Gutzlaff, 21

 Halifax, 192
 Hall of Antiquities, 137
 Hami, 119, 142, 145, 146, 148, 149,
 152, 164, 165, 168, 171, 181
 Hampstead, 190, 193, 195
 Han Dynasty, 75, 151
 Hankow, 30
 Haslett, Bishop of Japan, 194
 Henry of England, 176
 Herman, 35
 Hersen, 15
 Hill, David, 35
 Hinduism, 200
 Hindustan, 94
 Hitler, 177, 193
 Ho Chiang Kuei, 28
 Hodder and Stoughton, 157, 194
 Ho Mountains, 34
 Honan, 82, 123
 Hongkong, 20, 22, 150
 Hongshui, 123
 Horseshoe Temple, 136
 Hove, 192
 Hsi, 35, 36, 40, 50, 97
 Hsing-Hsing-Hsia, 142, 143, 144, 170,
 180
 Hsüan Chuang, 138
 Hunan, 62, 140
 Hung Hsiu Ch'üan, 21
 Hungling, 37
 Hungliuyuan, 143
 Hungtung, 64
 Hunter, George, 73, 146, 148, 149, 152,
 153, 154, 178, 180

 Hupeh Province, 138, 140
 Hu Shih, Dr., 61
 Hwahaitz, 142
 Hwanglukang, 145
 Hwochow, 27, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 41,
 42, 45, 48, 53, 55, 64, 67, 187

 Ignatov, 11
 Ili, 57, 140
 India, 75, 201, 210
India and the West, 201
 Indian Ludhiana College and Hos-
 pital, 193
 Inner Mongolia, 174
 International Express, 188
 International Settlement, 157
 Intourist Russian, 177, 178
 Iranian, 138, 151
 Ireland, 157
 Islam, 38, 65, 93, 94, 181
Izvestia, 14

 Jade Gate, 35
 Japan, 14, 62, 202
 Japanese, 151, 179, 180, 194
 Jesuit Missionaries, 21
 Jewry, 100
Journey with a Purpose, 197

 Kaifeng, 74
 Kalgan, 159
 Kalmuck, 83
 Kamul, 150
 Kanchow, 78, 81, 84, 153, 187
 Kanchow Christian Youth Club, 86
 K'ang Yu Wei, 21
 Kan Kiang River, 79
 Kansu, 62, 64, 73, 74, 75, 77, 82, 151,
 152, 163, 164, 174, 180, 184
 Kao, Dr., 78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 96, 98,
 102, 103, 122, 123, 124, 125, 158
 Kao, Mrs., 78
 Kaotai, 185
 Karashan, 178
 Kashgar, 134, 135, 140, 142, 146, 147,
 159, 172, 182, 200
 Kempis, Thomas à, 127, 137
 Khan, Old, 163
 Kiakta, 72, 74

- Kiayükwan, 92, 113, 164, 185
 Kingsway Hall, 176, 190
 Kinta, 104, 105, 106, 107, 142, 160
 Knox, John, 11
 Korean, 151
 Kremlin, 15
 Kublai Khan, 94
 Kung, Dr., 60
 Kuomintang Party, 21, 61
- Lamaism, 88
 Lanchow, 75, 78, 90, 91, 119, 126, 153, 186, 187
 Lankester, Sir E. Ray, 117
 Lao Tse, 75
 Latin America, 202, 210
 Latourette, 95
 Lawrence of Arabia, 148, 195
 League of Nations, 177
 Leeds, 182, 192, 195
 Lei, Deaconess, 101
 Lenin, Vladimir, 11, 15, 152, 155, 202
 Lhasa, 88, 120, 159
 Liangchow, 187
 Li Hung Chang, 34
 Lincoln, 195
 Liu, Elder, 96, 113, 134, 135, 136, 140, 185, 189
 Liverpool Central Hall, 195
 Livingstone, 175, 195
 Llandudno, 192
 Lob Desert, 146
 London, 152, 157, 174, 175
 London Missionary Society, 21
 London University, 190
 Lonely Little, 128, 129, 130, 131, 158
 (see also 'Topsy')
 Ludhiana Christian College, 199, 200, 201
- Macao, 21, 95
 Macarius, 72
 Macdonald, Ramsay, 155
 Ma Chung Ying, 151, 153, 163, 166, 167, 180, 185, 189, 193
 Maillart, Ella K., 164, 184
 Manchester, 193, 195
 Manchu, 20, 21, 31, 42, 55, 56, 59, 60, 65, 73, 151, 179
 Manchuria, 57, 62, 151, 152, 179
- Manichaeism-Turkish, 138
 Maoris, 198
 Mao Tse Tung, 61, 62, 180, 201
 Maria, 204, 205
 Marxism, 184, 201
 Mather, Percy, 152, 154, 172, 178
 Mausoleum, Moscow, 155
 Medea, 12, 65
 Medhurst, 21
 Melbourne, 197
 Methodius, 69
 Minehead, 192
 Ming period, 137
 Mongolia, 48, 57, 60, 65, 72, 73, 74, 84, 127, 140, 151, 152, 179
 Moore, George, 12
 Moravians, 72, 88
 Morgan, Dr. Campbell, 33
 Morley, Lord, 91
 Morris, David, 81
 Morrison, Dr. Robert, 21, 22, 60
 Moscow, 69, 70, 142, 155, 162, 174
 Moslems, 36, 154, 172
 Moslem Turks, 69
 Myriad Buddhas, Valley of the, 136
- Nagpur, 200
 Nanking, 20, 164, 211
 Napier, N.Z., 199
 Napoleon Bonaparte, 70
 Nasik Canadian Hospital, 199
 National Government, 186, 187
 Neill, Bishop Stephen, 102
 Nehru, Pandit, 203
 Nestorians, 75
 Newcastle, 193, 194, 195
 New York, 112
 New Zealand Bible Society, 196, 198
- Omsk, 155
 Oxford, 190
- Pakistan, 151
Parable of Jade, The, 194
 Paris, 164
 Paternoster Row, 194
 Paterson, John Dr., 70, 73
 Pas de Calais, 12, 176
 Peking, 20, 22, 59, 60, 140, 146, 152, 179, 188, 211

- Penzance, 192
 People's Republic, 119, 211
 Perth, Western Australia, 197
 Petun, 143
 Phillips, J. B., 104
Pilgrim's Progress, 152
 Pitt, Prime Minister, 59
 Plato, 69
 Plekhanov, 11
 Polo, Marco, 80, 86, 94, 140, 179
 Portsmouth, 12, 17, 18, 20
 Poutin, Felix, 168
 Pulungki, 117, 118, 143
 Pushkin, 14

 Qazaqs, 152, 155
 Quai des Eaux Vives, 13
 Queen, The, 195
 Queensland, 198

 Rahmn, Cornelius, 72
 Rattray, Captain, 137
 Reading, B.F.B.S., 190
 Reading, 192
 Red Prospect, 177
 Red Square, 155
 Rhyl, 192
 Ricci, Matteo, 95, 212
 Richard, Timothy, 21
 Richmond, 67
 Richthofen Mountain, 79, 136
 Rio, 208, 209
 Robertson, Leslie Murray, 17
Rock, The, 204
 Rodin's Monument, 176
 Romford, 193
 Ross, Sir Denison, 147
 Rotorua, 199
 Rowntree Clifford's West Ham Settlement and Old People's Home, 195
 Rousseau, 11
 Royal Central Asian Society, 190, 195
 Royal Scottish Geographical Society, 195
 Russia, 14, 20, 69, 151, 152, 178
 Russian Bible Society, 70
 Russian Five Year Plan, 155
 Russian Missionary Society, 71
 Russian Orthodox Church, 155, 211
 Russians, 14, 65, 162, 179

 Russian Siberia, 155
 Russell, Bertrand, 61
 Russell, George, 12

 Salisbury, 193
 Salvation Army, 16, 190, 192, 195, 199, 210
 Sanskrit, 88, 138
 Santaokow, 143
 Sassul, 11
 Sassulitch, 11
 Scotland, 157
 Seventh Day Adventists, 186
 Shackleton, 175
 Shaftesbury, 189, 190, 191, 194
 Shan Shan, 181
 Shanghai, 16, 31, 59, 64, 67, 82, 142, 157, 158, 187, 211
 Shansi Province, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 32, 36, 39, 58, 61, 74, 75, 140, 157, 180
 Shantan, 85, 123
 Sheffield, 194
 Shen, Bishop, 187
 Shensi, 75, 140, 180
 Sian, 31, 35, 75, 119, 187
 Siberia, 14, 71, 126, 146, 174, 177
 Silk Road, 35, 73, 74, 94, 119, 120, 151, 181, 187
 Singapore, 150
 Sining, 140
 Sinkiang, 57, 140, 141, 143, 146, 151, 153, 154, 159, 164, 170, 174, 178, 179, 185
 Slavonic, 70
 Smolensk, 70
 Soloviev, 15, 69
 Something Happened, 81, 175
 Soong Family, 60
 South America, 208
 Southsea, 17
 Soviet Russia, 151
 S.P.G., 187, 199
 Stafford, 193
 Stalin, 155, 202
 Stallybrass, Edward, 72
 Stanley, Henry, 73
 St. Columba's Presbyterian Church, 190
 Stein, Sir Aurel, 138

- Stockton-on-Tees, 193
 St. Omer, 12, 13, 17
 Stourton, 189
 St. Petersburg, 11, 70
 Student Christian Movement, 196
 Sven Hedin, 75
 Suchow, 80, 81, 90, 92, 96, 122, 124,
 127, 128, 141, 142, 151, 158, 160,
 161, 163, 164, 181, 187
 Sun Yat Sen, Dr., 21, 23, 55, 60, 61,
 76, 84
 Swan, William, 72
 Swanwick, 190, 207
 Sweden, 176, 187
 Swedish Christian Mission, 147
 Switzerland, 11, 176
 Sydney, 199
 Syriac, 138
 Szechwan, 140

 Tachuan, 143
 Taiping, 21, 60, 61
 Taiyuanfu, 27, 57
 Takla Makam, 146
 T'ang dynasty, 75
 Tao, 75
 Tartar, 69, 72, 98, 179
 Taylor, Dr. Hudson, 23, 31
 Teichman, Sir Eric, 182
 Thessalonica, 69
 Thousand Buddhas, Caves of a, 136,
 138, 168
 Tibet, 36, 57, 65, 74, 84, 87, 89, 140,
 151, 152, 174
 Tien Shen Mountains, 133
 Tientsin, 57, 97, 140
 Tobulsk, 71
 Tonypandy, 195
 Topsy, 132, 158, 159, 175, 176, 177,
 183, 185, 189, 193, 194, 195, 210
 Torquay, 192
 Toward Spiritual Maturity, 190
 Trans-Siberian route, 176, 188
 Trevelyan, G. M., 45
 Trotsky, 155
 Tunbridge Wells, 192
 Tungan, 71, 141, 151, 152, 163
 Tunhwang, 80, 94, 119, 132, 133, 134,
 135, 138, 139, 140, 164, 165, 167,
 168, 181

 Turfan, 140, 146, 171, 172, 179, 180,
 184
 Turkis, 65, 74, 84, 151, 152, 154,
 160, 162, 163, 179, 180
 Turkish Empire, 19
 Turkistan, 36, 60, 65, 141, 143, 150,
 162, 168

 Uighur, 138
 U.N. Narcotics Commission, 40
 Urals, 71, 175
 Urguis, 81
 Urumchi, 73, 81, 142, 151, 152, 153,
 154, 164, 172, 173, 177, 178, 179,
 180, 190
 U.S.A., 20

 Valignani, 95
 Vellore, 200
 Venice, 95, 140
 Vietnamese, 151
 Virgil, 69
 Vladivostock, 175
 Voltaire, 11

 Wales (North), 192, 193
 Wan Shun Shan, 126
 Wang, Abbot, 138
 Wang, Hsin, 28
 Wang, Pastor, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 65
 Ward, Barbara, 201, 202
 Weil, Simone, 163
 Wells, 192
 Wells, H. G., 117, 119
 Wendell Willkie, 59
 Wesley, John, 100
 Westminster Chapel, 33, 157
 Wheeler, Edith, 193, 210
 Whitehead, Professor A. N., 110
 Wigan, 195
 Willow Cottage, 174, 175, 176, 189,
 191, 193, 210
 Wilson, Bishop, 100
 Wilson, Woodrow, 15, 202
 Wimbledon, 190
 Wingate, Brigadier, 147
 Wingate, Rachel Orde, 147
 Woking, 195
 Women's Committee B.B.F.S., 139
 Wu Jong, 97

Wutai Mountain, 36
W.V.S., 194

Xavier, Francis, 111

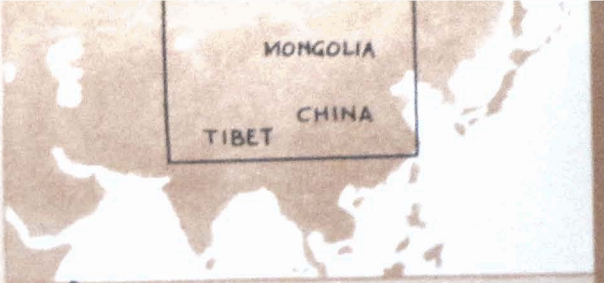
Yakuts, 71
Yang, Sin Shan, 96
Yeats, W. B., 12, 44
Yellow River, 74
Yen Hsi Shan, 61

Yenan, 62
Younghusband, Sir Francis, 77
Yuille, Roland, 72
Yümen, 80, 117, 119, 132, 140, 142
Yung Chan, 78

Zenana and Bible Medical Mission,
193, 201
Zikawei, 95, 211
Zosina, Father, 19
Zwingli, 11

U. S. S. R.

LAKE BAIKAL



To Novo Sibirsk

IRKUTSK

TANNU TUVA

MANCHURIA

SERGIOPOL

KIAKTA

LAKE BALKASH

BAXTI CHUGUCAK

URGA

REPUBLIC OF MONGOLIA

ALTAI MTS

URUMCHI

KUCHENG

G O B I DESERT

TIEN-SHEN MTS

BARKUL

TURFAN

HAMI

SINKIANG (CHINESE TURKISTAN)

HSING HSING HSIA

TACHUAN

KASHGAR

C

H

ANSI

PUUNCKI

I

A

KALGAN

PEKING

YELLOW SEA

YARKAND

TAKLA MAKAM DESERT

Lop Nor

TUNHWANG

KIAYUKWAN SUCHOW

YUEN KINTA PUYI

YENAN

TIENTSIN

SHANSI

HWOCHOW

KWEN LUN MOUNTAINS

RICHTHOFEN TANG

Kara Nor

LANCHOW

KANSU

SIAN SHENSI

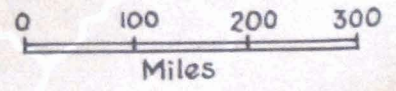
Hwang-ho

TIBET

Di-chu

Mekong

Yangtse



INDIA

H I M A L A Y A M T S

NEPAL

BHUTAN

Imaputra

Travel distances

Hwochow-Suchow	50 days
Suchow-Urumchi	36 "
Suchow-Kashgar	96 "
Suchow-Chuguchak	62 "

Journeys Suchow-Urumchi
 Taken four times
 Oasis area covered
 six times.

