



An elaborate grave used by the Bahnh tribespeople, Kontum, Viet Nam

W. E. EVANS

## They Walk in Darkness

By REV. W. EUGENE EVANS

WHEN I was a child I dreaded cemeteries. I had the idea they were inhabited by ghosts. Having been told that ghouls and goblins never come out except at night, I naturally associated them with darkness. Later I realized that such alleged apparitions are mere figments of man's imagination and that physical darkness need not be feared on their account.

Tribesmen in Viet Nam not only experience fears of that kind in their childhood days, but live in dread of spirits all their lives. No one can convince them that spirits do not exist. They are everywhere—in the trees, in certain birds, in various animals, in the water. All of them are bad and are to be avoided. Elaborate offerings are made to appease them and that practice has grown into a system of spirit wor-

ship. According to tribal lore the Chief of the Skies (God) is a good spirit, but on that account He is not feared, and consequently He is not worshiped. Since He is good He will do them no harm.

Unless a person from Western countries is familiar with the Scriptures and knows what they teach about demon power, he is apt to think the mountain people of Viet Nam very superstitious. They will seem to him as children because they still believe in ghosts and in spirits.

Missionaries do not lightly dismiss these things as entirely the product of unenlightened imaginations. Much of it is, but the forces of evil take advantage of both the tribespeople's ignorance and their fear of supernatural manifestations to enslave them. So strong is the

bondage that it controls every phase of their lives. If a child is ill, they make a sacrifice to the spirits. The first fruits of every harvest are given to the spirits. When a new house is completed a water buffalo is offered to the spirits. Offerings are made to the spirits when a new grave is opened and later when it is finally abandoned. Only when a tribesman repents and experiences the power of the Holy Spirit making real to him the things of Christ is the darkness dispelled. Deliverance from fear of evil spirits follows deliverance from sin.

In this land of spiritual night children are born in darkness, live their short span of life in darkness and die, to go out into eternal night. Many of them never once hear of the One who said, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever

believeth on me should not abide in darkness." The words of the psalmist aptly describe the lost condition of these people: "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness."

Some years ago as I entered a village and was greeted by the national worker located there, I heard an eerie wail. The sound was coming from the direction of the cemetery and I knew someone was mourning before a new grave. The worker told me that one of the finest Christians in the village had died and his wife, still clinging to her heathen ways, was wailing for him. I immediately took the path to the cemetery and there saw the widow kneeling before the grave. Although I was less than ten feet from her she paid no attention to me.

About a week later we made another visit to that village for the purpose of seeing the widow. When we reached the longhouse where she lived we found that her eldest daughter was very ill. She apparently had pneumonia. Immediately we began to make arrangements to move her to the hospital in Pleiku. Unexpected opposition suddenly frustrated our plans. The mother refused to allow the child to be moved because she was unwilling to accompany her to the hospital. Her reason for objecting was that she must visit her husband's grave each morning and evening to offer food to the spirits. The offering had to be followed by a time of wailing. Heathen custom required that she continue doing this every day for many months. Sometimes a mourner will visit the grave of a relative every day for three or four years until the time comes for abandoning it. A great sacrifice is made on the day the grave is declared abandoned, and it is never visited again.

When we found why the mother would not go, we begged her to consider the consequences if her daughter did not receive medical attention. She adamantly refused our pleas. Two weeks later the child died. The body was placed in the same casket—a hollowed-out log—with the remains of her father.

Less than three months later a second child died and was buried. Faithfully each day, after sunup and

just before it dipped behind the hill at eventide, the bereaved wife and mother made her pilgrimage from the longhouse to the cemetery. Daily her piteous wail could be heard from any place in the village.

She turned her back upon aid that probably would have saved her children because she feared the evil spirits more than she loved her own flesh and blood. Her children were, in a sense, sacrificed in order that she might appease the evil spirits. She represents hundreds of tribespeople who persist in their heathen ways because they fear the power of unseen enemies.

Again and again such experiences remind us that as missionaries of the gospel we are infringing upon Satan's territory. He controls the land as if it were his domain and the people his charges. In the name of Christ and by His authority we must do more than infringe upon Satan's domain. We must penetrate to the very core of this land "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. . . ."

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### A Timely Witness

By REV. PAUL S. DAVIS, Thailand

One evening recently Mr. Gaow returned to his room from his work at the sawmill and prepared for supper. Under a strange compulsion he picked up his Bible and carried it with him down the street to the restaurant. Supper ended, he wondered why the Lord had told

him to bring his Bible for it was still unopened. Puzzled, Mr. Gaow walked slowly home, but he felt compelled to walk on past his home. Still wondering, he strolled slowly on until he came to another eating shop where the owner called out, "Come in and have some rice." He went in and gave her one of the tracts he kept in his Bible. On seeing it she said, "Oh, is this about the Jesus religion?"

"Yes," Mr. Gaow replied.

"Well then, it's no use, I just can't understand the foreign religion. I've received some tracts before but I can't figure them out."

"But Jesus is the Saviour of the whole world, not just of foreigners. What is it that you don't understand?" Mr. Gaow asked. From his opened Bible he carefully answered her questions. The little shop filled with interested listeners and Mr. Gaow continued to earnestly witness to the woman for about an hour. At last she said, "Yes, I do understand now. It's not just a foreign religion. I, too, should trust in Jesus to save me as He has you."

A little later Mr. Gaow went home, for the hour was late. The next morning he was shocked to hear that the lady had died suddenly during the night, only about six hours after he had talked with her. She was about forty years old and apparently in good health. How glad Mr. Gaow was that he had obeyed the Spirit who led him unerringly to that needy woman.

Rev. Pham-xuan-Tin, president of the Vietnamese missionaries to the tribes, preaching in a Riong village. Messrs. Tot and H. A. Jackson are at the left.

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