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Metnam

History

Children's Meeting at the Tourane Outstation.

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Wednesday afternoon—time for the children's meeting at Hai Chow, and we must hurry. It will take us about half an hour to get there. We must first go through the town and then down a country road through a large Annamese village. As we go, we meet the women going to market and the well dressed young men going to work in the French offices. We pass the thatched houses of the natives, rich and poor; but every house is picturesquely surrounded by shrubs and trees and each has its little garden which is usually well kept. Here is a woman selling vegetables at her little stand beside the road. Farther on we meet another selling beetle nuts. What kind of nuts are they? They are nuts that the Annamese cut in small pieces, mix with a little lime and then chew. This is a most disgusting habit, even worse than chewing tobacco. And when you ask the Annamese if it is good, they say, "No." When they first take it, they do not like it at all, but it is the custom of the country and of course must be kept.

But here we are almost at the chapel. "Are there many children?" you ask. Wait a moment and you will see. They will soon hear the noise of the carriage and out they come from houses, lanes, and fields, each one calling to the others along the way. What a flock of them! See how they run ahead of us, all eager to reach the chapel first and get a front seat. When we arrive, we find the place almost full, and five minutes later every seat is taken and some are sitting on the platform. The rest must be kept out. Why not have a larger place? Well, the chapel is large enough for the evening services and we can accommodate two hundred children. We must admit that we never thought that we should have such crowds.

Now let us have a look at the children. These boys in front on the right hand side are the most intelligent and we expect much from them. On the left are the girls. I wish that I could say that they are as bright as the boys, but I cannot.

"But," you say, "that girl on the front seat seems to be more clever than any of the boys."

"Ah, yes, but she is a boy."

"Well, she dresses like the girls and wears earrings. I thought you said that only girls wear earrings and that that was the one infallible way of distinguishing between the boys and the girls."

"That is so, but this boy is an exception. He wears girl's clothes and sits with the girls because he is an only child and exceptionally bright, and his parents are afraid that the devil will get him, so they pretend that he is a girl. Thus they think

to deceive the demons and protect their only child from harm.

In the back part of the chapel the little children are seated, and the doors are crowded with men and women. We have no room for the older people at the children's meeting; however, we invite them to return for the evening services. But many of them are content to stand in the hot sun for an hour or so, and we are glad to have them listen, for, who knows but that some seed sown may fall upon good ground and bring forth fruit.

Now we must proceed with the service. First of all we sing several hymns. Of course we must sing "Jesus loves me," because they like that best of all, and then "There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus." Now we shall pray. When this is done the children bow their heads in their little hands and close their eyes, although sometimes they peep through their fingers. They do not talk while we are praying, they know it is wrong and never make a sound while we are talking to the heavenly Father.— Did that sound startle you when we finished praying? It was only the children saying amen, though I must admit it sounded like a low rumble of thunder.

We shall now have the lesson, and first of all we ask how many remember last week's lesson. See them jump up, all eager to tell it. And again, when we ask for the Golden Text, many hands are raised. You cannot imagine what all this means to us, for well we remember our first meetings last October. The children knew absolutely nothing about the gospel. They did not know who God was and they had never heard of Jesus. Now they know about God and creation, the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ and many other things.

At the close of the lesson we teach them the new Golden Text, and all who learn it will receive a picture card. We use the International Sunday School lessons and give the children the pictures that illustrate the lesson. Of course the cards are printed in English but we write the Golden Text in Annamese on strips of paper and paste them on the backs of the cards. "Does everybody get a card?" you ask. We give the cards to those who learn the Golden Text, but I am glad to say that means everyone. It is rather hard for some of the little tots but they do their best and, even if they cannot always repeat the verse word for word, we feel that they should be rewarded for making the attempt.

After the cards are distributed, the meeting is dismissed with prayer and the children return to their homes.

We know the value of sowing the seed in young hearts, and some day expect to gather fruit from this branch of our work.