

# The Story of Our "Ba."

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p. 73

The first Biblewoman of Annam.  
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In one of the quaint little country villages of Annam, some fifty years ago, was born a little baby girl. She was an unusually fortunate baby, for her parents were wealthy, and her father a high government official. This little daughter grew up in luxury and inherited a goodly share of the pride of birth, which even now makes her to consider herself far above ordinary humanity.

Her home was built of brick instead of the usual straw and bamboo, and was roomy and fine. She had servants to wait on her and was carried in an elegantly covered hammock when she wished to go any distance. When she was old enough, she went to live with an "Ong-Thay," or teacher, whose home was the Annamese equivalent of our boarding-schools. Here she was thoroughly taught the "colloquial character" and, as she had a bright and intelligent mind, she learned quickly and well. To be educated in this way is quite an unusual accomplishment for an Annamese girl, and only a few of the rich men's daughters have the opportunity. Still the people have a great eagerness to study, and my language teacher tells me some of his rich relations would willingly give much money to help open a good school for their children. Perhaps we shall be able to do this some day. In the meantime we feel that the first necessity is to have a press with which we can supply Christian literature for those who can already read, and in this way prepare for future work along other lines.

So our "Ba," as we call her, received her education, and when she was eighteen years old, she was married and went to her husband's home. He, too, was a man of high official rank, and has his Mandarin's degree, indicated by a small tablet which he wears on his breast. To obtain this degree he had to pass difficult examinations. He is, therefore, well-read in Confucian lore and the other wise books written in the Chinese literary language, the Wenli, which is understood by the educated classes in China, Japan, Korea, Annam, etc., in somewhat the same way as Latin used to be the language of the learned in Europe during the Middle Ages. There is very little literature in the Annamese tongue, and it may be that giving the Bible to the people in the colloquial will do for the Annamese what the Chinese Bible is said to have done for that language, and Luther's version of the German Bible for that country—give the people a literature in their own colloquial tongue, intelligible not only to the learned but also to the common people.

In course of time the "Ba" lost her wealth, and the family became poor through the death of her father, the wars which came to this harassed land, and other causes. But we believe that in her case, as in many a life in the

homeland, God had better things in store for her than mere earthly wealth and honor. He was preparing her for "the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for her, and for all of us who take up our cross and follow Him, our Lord and Master.

In the fall of 1913, when I arrived in Tourane, we felt that it would be good to get a woman teacher, if possible, whom we could thus at the same time train for future work. So we prayed earnestly that God would supply this need, and then waited for the answer. After a few weeks, the "Ba" arrived from Hue, the capital, where her husband is

still working in some official capacity. One morning one of our men teachers brought her to me and I was told this was to be my teacher. She looked to be such a frail little woman, and doubtless she was a little scared at the responsibility of teaching a foreign lady. However a short acquaintance with her showed that she possessed an undaunted spirit and was as proud as a queen. None of her many trials and misfortunes had been able to vanquish her, and we often marvel at her brightness and vivacity even now when she is getting old, is poor, and is persecuted by her own family.

Month after month we talked and studied together, and I told her the beautiful Bible stories which were all so fresh and new to her, and day by day she absorbed the sweet gospel message of Jesus and His love, till quite naturally, as a flower opens under the influence of the warm rays of the sun, she opened her heart to the Sun of Righteousness, and learned to love Jesus as her personal Saviour.

One day her eyes, which had long been troubling her, were so bad that she could hardly see to read, and it was distressing to work with her. So I told her how Jesus could heal her now as well as He had formerly healed the sick, and then she in simple faith asked that I pray for her. She was healed completely, and like the man whom Jesus healed in the



"BA"

days of yore she "published it abroad" to her relatives and friends. In visiting the humble homes of the people with me, she faithfully helped me in telling the gospel story and reading passages of Scripture to the people.

Last fall she was baptized, publicly and fearlessly, in the ocean bay near our mission home. It must have required considerable courage for the old lady to take this step, but she looks so happy as she talks of how Jesus loves her and she loves Him. She has had to take up her cross in a very real way, for after living a few months after her baptism in the home of her son-in-law, she has had to leave. She came to us weeping bitterly, for she has an affectionate heart, and dearly loves her daughter and grandchildren. She told us how he had sent her out of his home, because according to their customs she is wicked, for she will no longer worship the family ancestors. This ancestor worship, a form of Confucianism,

has a powerful hold on the hearts and minds of the Annamese people, and it means breaking away from the family and friends if they refuse to take their part in these religious ceremonies.

Since her baptism she has been doing the work of a Biblewoman, visiting the women and reading to them, and teaching them about Jesus. Now she is living in one of the small servants' rooms at the back of the mission home—away from her own people but happy because she loves Jesus and can work for Him.

One afternoon last week the "Ba" went with us to a village a few miles away, set in the midst of vivid green ricefields. By invitation we entered the picturesque home of the Mayor of the place. He is a tall and dignified man, and received us graciously. Then quickly donning his long velvet robe lined with brilliant silk, and winding his two or three yards' long turban of fine black material around his gray-haired head, he sat down, cross-legged, on the polished wooden platform which serves as table or bed as occasion demands, for the real Annamese seldom use chairs. In a loud and commanding voice he decreed that his family and friends gather to hear us preach. This they quickly and obediently did, for obedience to the aged, and especially to the head of the house, is a cardinal virtue among these people.

Meanwhile one of the young men prepared tea on a side table and poured it into tiny cups, which the daughter of the house passed around. We drank the bitter concoction, minus milk or sugar! Our main object was to talk the gospel, so after singing one or two hymns and explaining something of the meaning, we read Mark xvi. from a tract which I have recently had printed, several copies of which I passed around, and then the "Ba" discoursed in fine style. She is really quite a preacher, and even these educated men listened quite attentively, which was surprising, for women are held in rather low esteem in these eastern lands. However our "Ba" usually takes occasion to inform them of her "high connections" and "aristocratic" family, and though this is not quite consistent with the simplicity of the gospel and the humility which should distinguish the followers of the lowly Jesus, still it is excusable in one so recently converted, and may even have its uses as it undoubtedly makes the people respect her here where social rank is so important. Even Paul, on occasion, demand respectful treatment because of the honor of being a free-born Roman citizen! I also talked to them a little in Annamese, and one of the younger men who understood me very well, repeated to the old gentleman. As is so often the case, we had to spend considerable time in refuting Catholicism, and make them to understand that we were not of the same type of Christians (?) as the oftentimes immoral priests! We left the tracts with them, these being as yet the only ones we have in Annamese, the earnest we trust of much similar literature which we shall be able to supply cheaply and in abundance if we can get a small printing press here in Annam for this purpose. This man is rich and his house is beautiful according to Annamese standards, containing much fine carved woodwork, but alas also an elaborately decorated shrine for their rites of ancestral worship. God grant that as they read His Word, some ray from the true "Light of Life" may penetrate the gloom of their heathenism.

In Romans 16:5, Paul says, "Salute my well-beloved Epænetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ." So, by inversion, we might say, "Our well-beloved 'Ba'.

who is the firstfruits among the women of Annam unto Christ saluteth you." May she be the first of a great band of noble women in Annam who shall go out into the by-ways and hedges and visit the countless little hidden-away, garden-encicled homes of Annam and do the work which none other can do so well.

This morning as I was out for a walk, some women urged me to come into their home, and were so pleased when I consented! I had the Gospel of John with me, and I read a little of the beautiful promises of peace and joy which Jesus gives His disciples. Then I told them about the immortal soul which only He can save. They listened attentively and begged for books, and I promised them some tracts which I have for free distribution, the first of many I trust to be provided as there is such a great need of them. When I left this home and passed another one, the children, who knew me and often come to our services and Sunday-school, sang in their clear young voices,

"What can wash away my sins,  
Nothing but the Blood of Jesus."

How sad that only now, after nearly two thousand years of the gospel dispensation has passed, this glorious truth of the sole efficacy of Jesus' Blood is becoming known in spiritually dark Annam! May God's children NOW buy up the opportunity and give of their time in prayer, their money, and if possible themselves, "For the night cometh when no man can work," how soon God alone knows. Meanwhile the twenty million or more souls go on in sin and ignorance. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of Peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." Will YOU help to bring the gospel of Peace to this radiant, sun-lit land, where the lofty purple mountains rise in majesty to the deep blue sky above, while at their base the waves of liquid azure seem to sigh in age-long sorrow for the sins of the people who knew not the true God?

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