

Letter from China.

THE ENQUIRER.

WOULD you like to know something about those people who come to us for advice? Let me tell you, that one of the most interesting studies in China is the study of the people themselves. It has often been said, that the Chinese mind is past finding out. At times it may seem that way. We, as missionaries, have perhaps a better opportunity than other foreigners in China to learn the train of Chinese thoughts. In our dealings with the people we are, however, mostly limited to those who profess an interest in the work we represent, or in other words, those who are enquirers. These may be divided into three groups or classes.

China has always been proud of her literary men, or rather, the literary men have always been proud of themselves. Many from this class come to make enquiries, not perhaps so much about Christianity as about things foreign, now about the war. These people are somewhat difficult to deal with. The trouble is, they say too many nice things about you, about the message you preach, and about the country you come from. But don't you get conceited, because they do not mean it that way. They say those things to please you, or at least, to make you feel, that they themselves are cultured people. These people are always ready to talk religion. Most of them, have by this time acquired a few Christian phrases and these phrases they make use of much to the disgust of the missionary. Some fail to pronounce the name of Jesus correctly. I have heard some say ty-by instead of ti-bai for worship, etc. They don't seem to be much troubled with unbelief. There is nothing in heaven, or on earth that they do not avow faith in, only too bad, they say, the masses are ignorant and don't understand the doctrine. In dealing with this class one must be careful so as not lightly to offend them, yet no serious risk is run, if one talks quite plainly to them about the claims of Christ.

Here you have a typical case; Mr. Wang is the major of a large country town. He calls on the missionary, commends his well-spoken language, tells him what a boon the Gospel is to the Chinese, and how flourishing his native country is, turns next to the terrible war in Europe, even made more terrible by the Chinese newspapers and ending up by venturing some opinions regarding the future fate of China. On the last subject he holds somewhat pessimistic views. He says, a Chinese Civil war is unavoidable, if, as now is proposed, the republican form of government is exchanged for a monarchical one. "The whole world at war! Where shall we then look for refuge?" It was pointed out to him that Christ had foretold, that nation will rise in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. It was also told him that there is a refuge, and that this refuge is Christ Himself.

The second class of enquirers gives more hope to the new missionary. They are the ones with bright face, eager eye and close attention. How earnest they are! They learn to imitate the foreigner in his prayers and preaching, they like to associate themselves very close with him to find out his likes and dislikes. Just like the man in Luke 9:59, they say, we will follow you wherever you go. Fortunately, in most cases their mercenary object is disclosed early enough to prevent great calamities. Sometimes it is not, and evil is sure to follow. It is not seldom that a missionary gets cheated. To this

class belong the idlers, who are on a lookout for a job, the poor, who hope thereby to get fed, the oppressed, who think the missionary will act as their advocate, the rascal, who hopes to find protection within the mission compound, and a host of others. In fact, very few come in as inquirers, who have no ulterior motives. When I first came to this city, there were many who wanted to join the mission, perhaps there are fewer now. Remember particularly a blacksmith of this city. He attended our meetings, had always something to tell the missionary after the meeting, when he was offered tea, he lifted the tea cup high above his head, closed his eyes and prayed. What a wonderful man! One evening he wanted to speak privately with the missionary, confess his sins, thought he—but no, not that, he had a son, a very good one, who was an expert in preparing fine dishes, he went on to enumerate a long list of these dishes, and this man had now in his heart to gladden the lonely missionary by his fine skill. This man's motive was discovered, and he was told, very politely, of course, that the foreigner had no particular taste for these dishes. The man has stayed away since.

What is a man, little acquainted with the Chinese train of thought, to do with this kind of enquirers? He should not deal too harshly with them. Jesus did not deal harshly with them. Buried beneath their ulterior motives, there may be a feeble longing after something better. We must tell these people as the Lord told the man already alluded to, "I have no place or gains for you. I can not pay your debt, I can not help you with that lawsuit of yours, I can not promise you any work or any food, I have no silver or gold, but what I have, I give you, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, walk."

The third class is easily recognized. Some missionaries would have it, that there is no third class of enquirers, but I contend there not only is a third kind of enquirers, but that this class is readily recognized. These are the seekers after God. Several years ago a woman came to our compound. She lived at a distant place, and having heard of us, she came purposely to inquire of the things she had heard. She told us, that in all her lifetime, she had never worshipped idols, nor burned incense, but that she had worshipped "a God that is above." And not only that, but God had shown her marvelous things in the "highest heaven." We have no reason to believe that this woman told lies. The Chinese women in this district, don't feel a bit ashamed of their worshipping and burning incense before the idols, so if she had been doing this, it would have been nothing to conceal. God is known to some people, "because what may be known about Him is plain to their inmost consciousness; for He Himself has made it plain to them." In nearly every new place opened, do we realize that "God has many people in this place." With the arrival of the Gospel these people will come forward and joyfully accept Christ.

At this stage in the mission work, the enquirer is at hand, what we need is wisdom from God to lead him into the truth.

—H. M. NESSE.

Suiping, Ho, Nov. 4, 1915.

"If pains afflict or wrongs oppress,
If cares distract or fears dismay,
If guilt deject, if sin distress,
The remedy's before thee—pray."