

Letter from Hungshan.

(By H. M. Nesse.)

I AM just about to finish up a month's stay out in the country districts. Most of the time has been spent in teaching inquirers at two of our outstations. It was especially encouraging to have a goodly number of the baptized Christians at these places attend the instruction. Some of our Christians make us feel, that their instruction is finished with the baptismal act. Some preaching tours to the neighboring towns and villages were made when the weather permitted such trips. The first five days and nights of my sojourn it rained without cessation. The roads were changed into water-courses, the lanes in the towns and villages were transformed into small lakes. The mudhut in which I stayed began to show distinct marks of the wet outside. Fortunately it cleared up in time so the house is standing yet. But as "every cloud has a silver lining," so also these clouds. The wet weather afforded me time to review some Chinese books and to make preparations for the sunny days to come. Purposely, only Chinese books were packed into my satchel at the start, but being pinned down to a small dark room all this time, the reading was getting to be a drudgery. It was therefore a happy day, when, one of those dark days, a man came from the city bringing along a bunch of newspapers, our church-papers, and a number of magazines.

Let no one imagine that there is much fascination about such stays in a Chinese town. Yet with an open eye, each day has in store for you new interest; each day you learn to know the "man of Cathay" a little better. In fact the Chinaman is pretty much like his western brother. "And (He) made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth." To make a living for himself and to transmit posterity, about these two things centers the life of the Chinaman. The latter is, at least theoretically, the weightier matter. The question "to be or not to be," is a very keen one with the man in China. The struggle for bread seems to absorb every other interest. With this object in mind the Chinese will faithfully worship his gods and make oblations to his ancestors. Religion is being engaged in mainly for materialistic ends. Very many are also drawn to Christianity with this end in view. Authorities on this subject claim that every Chinaman won over to the Christian religion in China, was at first influenced by ulterior motives. The experience of the average missionary, awake enough to see things as they really are, will corroborate this claim. To illustrate: the other day a mother told me, that she was so anxious to have her only son, eighteen years old, believe the Gospel. Yes, said she, because, since her husband, who now was dead, believed the Gospel, he struck her much more gently than he did before he believed. It would surely make her boy more gentle. Upon being asked about her own relation to Jesus, she only laughed and said, "How can I, a stupid, old, and almost blind woman believe?"

One member of the catechetical class, a very fresh one from the farm, came stealthily into my room one late evening and wanted to have a word with the pastor. No, he was not at all troubled about his soul. He began to unbutton his garments, and finally brought out a sheet of paper in his hand. He had some misunderstandings with his neighbor that would need attention, and now since he had become a Christian he thought that the pas-

tor would render the necessary help. (Just now I have another delegation from this man for help in some kind of "persecution" he has gotten into.) The day before yesterday the evangelist told me that a certain woman in the class was here because the devil was ill-treating the members of her family. The family was said to be very well satisfied with the result of this experiment. The devil was kept at bay since she "believed." Yesterday some well-meaning people called at our chapel, who wanted us to go with them home and expell the devil from a young woman. About a week ago someone brought me the happy news, that both man and wife had made up their minds to become "Christians" provided they could secure employment on the mission compound. So, I could go on and enumerate many more instances.

But let no one think, that on this account the Chinaman does not make a good Christian. It only implies that a good deal of "clearing of ground" must be done before he will be able to recognize the real aim of Christianity. And it is this clearing process we try to carry on in the catechumenical instruction. A good deal of our preaching must also have the same aim. And it is wonderful to see what the grace of God can do also for a man in China. Not that the end in view is attained in every case, but through it all, we keenly realize the Spirit's presence with the Word, and souls are brought to a living knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes the noblest characters develop in the most unfavorable surroundings. The Chinese army is not noted for its high moral standing. A small division of soldiers is stationed at this point, and among these soldiers I have found the most earnest Christians that I have met anywhere. Mr. Liu, one of these, has preached several times at our chapel. His testimony was heart-searching, and, better still, you felt a stalwart Christian personality behind it. From my room I overheard some personal talks this man had with individuals, that made my heart rejoice. One afternoon he kept on with one man for about two hours, his text being, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The man could make no possible escape and finally surrendered. I asked Mr. Liu how long he had been a Christian, to which he replied, "Only four years." What a wonderful clearing process has gone on in that soul these four years! A living Christ has entered and transformed that life. Seven of the epistles in the New Testament he could repeat from memory; both the Old and the New Testament were very familiar to him.

Last night I was told about another man whom I have known for years. When we first met he was eating opium. About a year ago he decided for Christ. He confesses it was a hard job, but he read the New Testament and prayed until he got the victory. As he formerly had been a great lover of questionable novels, he now gathered all these into one pile and burned them right outside our chapel door.

This young man is not baptized yet. At present he is attending one of our higher schools.

In a few days I trust to be back to the city again only to resume the same work with a class of inquirers in the city, which will be concluded at Christmas.

Hungshan, Honan, November 28, 1916.