



A STORY I SHALL NEVER FORGET

Shortly before the Bamboo Curtain isolated most of China from the rest of the world, this incident took place in Shanghai. It was late evening and I was landing at Shanghai Airport on a return flight from Formosa. When I managed to get a taxi I had the driver take me to my quarters at the China Inland Mission.

My arrival at the Mission was of a late hour and most of the lights were out. One small bulb burning in the vestibule revealed to me a note which advised me that a number of guests were staying at the compound that night, and a room-mate had been assigned to share my room.

I tip-toed up the stairs and when I entered my small room I noticed the extra cot alongside of mine ... and it was occupied, so I prepared for bed in the dark.

As I lay there, thinking back over the day, I suddenly became aware that the man next to me was crying. At first I thought he was dreaming, but I discounted that when the sobbing continued for some fifteen or twenty minutes.

I looked at the form on the other cot. His face was covered but I could see his whole body shaking from his uncontrollable weeping. I walked over and placed my hand on his shoulder.

"Friend," I said, "I don't know you ... and I guess you don't know me, either, but whatever your trouble is, I wish you'd share it with me. The Bible says we're to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

I learned he was a missionary. As I looked at the man and listened to him speak, I knew that some great tragedy had taken place.

"Missionaries carry burdens a lot of folks don't even dream of," I said to him. "Wouldn't you like to tell me about this thing that has so broken your heart?"

The look on his face was almost one of relief, and he started to tell me his story.

Twenty-one years before, this man had come from the central part of the United States to be a missionary to China. With him was his bride, whom he described as a wonderful girl, radiant with the full bloom of Mid-Western health. The two of them had asked not to be assigned to one of the cities along the China coast. They wanted a place of difficult service — a place where very few others would even dare to go.

And they got what they asked for. They were sent almost to the border of Western China. The people to whom they ministered were actually from Tibet. Through the years they had come across the border into China to live. It was just about as far from civilization as a person could get. It took them almost four months just to get there.

Once every three years the missionary and his wife would return to the China coast to receive a physical check-up and to replenish dwindling supplies. My heart felt heavy and I found myself saying, "It's no wonder you're discouraged, friend. Your life as a missionary hasn't been an easy one."

"Oh, we didn't mind those things," he told me. "We expected life to be hard. Why, we worked seven years without a single convert. We tried hard to learn their language and to let them know we loved them, but they refused to give us their confidence.

"Then, in that seventh year, something happened that

was ultimately to bring about a greater victory for Christ than my wife or I would ever have attained within ourselves. God gave us a tiny gift—a baby girl. I helped to bring her into the world with my own rough hands. She was like a bundle of sunshine. She scattered the loneliness like sunbeams scatter the darkness of night. God had given her to us and we loved her with a full and thankful heart. But the gift was not ours, alone. She also belonged to the Tibetan people.

"As our baby grew," he said, "as she began to crawl from place to place, we noticed how the Tibetans would watch her and smile. They were showing a fondness for our daughter they had never shown for us. And as our girl learned to talk, she learned Tibetan as easily as the native children did. Then one day we discovered that as we taught our child verses of Scripture and Gospel choruses, she, in turn, would teach them to the Tibetan children who would say them.

"Before our eyes we were witnessing a miracle. Just when it seemed there was no hope of ever reaching the Tibetan people's hearts with the Gospel, out of our baby's mouth came the most effective witness for Christ. Our first convert came through the instrumental use of the child God had given to us. Now we have eight converts!"

Secretly I thought to myself how precious this man must be in the sight of the Lord. Twenty-one years had been spent to show eight people the way to eternal life.

There was another moment of silence ... and then he said, "As I sit here talking to you, my wife and my 14 year old daughter are sailing down the river to the Pacific Ocean. They're on their way home to America."

"If they're going home, why don't you go?" I asked him. "If lack of funds is preventing you, I'll wire America tonight. I know churches that would send you the money to fly home so you could meet your family at the dock when they land in New York. Twenty one years is long enough for one man to serve. Let somebody else take over."

"But what about the eight converts?" was his immediate reply. "They're young in Christ and they are struggling in their godless environment. They need guidance in their Christian growth. It would be years before someone else could learn the language. The seed we've sown might be swept away. No, I must return. Tomorrow morning I'm going back for three more years."

"But your family?" I said. "Wouldn't you rather be together?"

The answer that followed told me many things.

"For more than a year," he said, "there has been a numbness in my daughter's arm. When we brought her to Shanghai for medical attention the Christian doctor took me to one side, and although it broke his heart to do so, he told me the price exacted for our work among the Tibetan people. No, Pierce, it's not the loneliness and the hardship that breaks a dedicated heart. It's the far greater price of what can happen when your loved ones are subjected to the elements of an unknown land. The girl that God gave us on the mission field had contracted leprosy. This has been the big price to go with God."

Tired though I was, there was no sleep that night for me. That morning as I told my missionary friend goodbye and saw him head back alone for the borders of Tibet, I could not escape the heart-searching realization that "a few who have so little, give so much, while so many in the world who have so much, give so little."

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Except a man deny himself and take up his cross and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple."

What have you denied yourself ... to serve Him?"

—As related by Dr. Bob Pearce

in Evangelical Christian