

THE POOR OF PEKING¹

SCENES AT A SALVATION ARMY KITCHEN

BY ADJUTANT JEAN GRAHAM

I INVITE you to come with me while we go sight-seeing in Peking. I shall not introduce you to beautiful places, but to interesting, if pathetic, people. I promise to keep altogether within the realm of fact.

Let us walk in a northerly direction from our little quarters. You are soon attracted by the number of queerly dressed men and women we pass on our way to the Lama Temple. They are Mongolians, who have come hither to worship the Living Buddha, who is at present the honored guest of the Peking Government. Though so odd, and dirty in appearance, they are really better off than the majority of busy people we see around; in fact, the greasier their silk and leather clothing, the greater their wealth.

But our business does not lie with these Mongolians. We will pass only through the grounds of their Lama Temple, that being the nearest way to our destination.

Leaving the Lama Temple, we emerge at the back into a small *hut'ung*. Turning the corner, we come upon a different class of people — the really poor. They are congregated outside the gate of another temple — the Temple of the White Tree. The halt, the blind, the lame, the old, the feeble, the diseased, and even the demented, are among this crowd of human wretch-

edness. Mothers are clasping little babies under thin clothing, and holding on to wee toddlers. A little child leads a blind beggar. An old woman of eighty hobbles along with the aid of a stick. Every kind of physical disablement seems to be portrayed here, and where, in other lands, the background would be a hospital and gentle care, here it is cold poverty and the merciless crushing of a hungry crowd. All are waiting for the porridge kitchen to open its doors.

We are allowed to enter in advance, and find ourselves in a spacious courtyard. The top has been covered with straw matting, and it is thus transformed into a comfortable shed. In one corner, styled the kitchen, two huge iron pots are built in. These generous vessels are capable of cooking sufficient yellow millet porridge to feed twelve hundred people. With the aid of rails and posts the shed is divided into four enclosures.

You think it strange that the Salvation Army should be thus occupying one of the courtyards of a Buddhist temple? But we need ample space for a food kitchen, and this is not always easy to secure. Temples usually possess many large unused courtyards; we begged the use of this one from the head priest here. He received us in his beautifully furnished private apartments at the rear of the Temple grounds. When, after much ceremony

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and polite conversation, we preferred our request, he declared that ours was a good work, a charitable work; it was so kind of the foreigner to engage in this work; it was a favor to him to have such good work going on in his premises; and he graciously gave permission for the Army to plant a porridge kitchen in one corner of his domain.

But the porridge is now ready, and looks appetizing and nourishing. The huge doors are thrown open, and the police have much ado to keep order. No doubt all the people are hungry, but order must be preserved. To relax would mean a scramble, horrid and beastly, for a place inside the door. Ticket-holders are admitted first. These come from hundreds of homes that have been visited by Army officers, and represent a pitiful and varied history of poverty.

The day is bitterly cold, and ice is lying about the streets. Yet many of these people have but a single ragged garment. A number have the remains of many garments, the sum total of which, however, does not provide the warmth of one decent garment. Patches, paper, and string, if not popular, are evidently fashionable. A study of the faces that pass before us ought to move the pity of a sphinx. A knowledge of the facts of their lives should bring some kind of succor from those with hearts to feel.

As they file by the officer who is filling to the brim the bowls held out, I will give you brief details of some of their stories.

Do you see that tall thin woman who is carrying a lovely little girl? She was wealthy once — had her carriage and servant. The little girl's face betokens the retired life she has been used to. The ragged brocaded-silk garment tied tightly around the little body speaks of better days. Fortune's smile in China

is particularly fickle. Her husband lost his position and his money, and to-day they fight rebelliously against poverty. A bare room, a brick bed half covered with a pile of unsalable books, a small stove, some broken vessels, and very meagre bedding, comprise the present home. This woman, who is well educated, has sought God's help. She is trying to be good, but the memories of other days — the luxuries, the theatre, the parties, the social round, and the accompaniments of wealth — rise before her and mock her; a rebellious look lingers in her piercing dark eyes. She needs praying for. We try to help her in other ways, too; but *there are so many others!*

Glance at that quiet-looking woman with faultlessly clean, if thin, garments; she is looking nervously around at the press of uncleanness beside her. Her soul revolts against this close contact with filth, disease, and vermin. The delicate pale-faced girl with her shrinks back, and looks appealingly at her mother. Driven by hunger, they have conquered their pride and come to the porridge kitchen, but they had not reckoned on this! They have too recently descended from comfort to poverty to be at all happy here, or even much comforted with the food. They are feeling they would rather starve than endure this again.

They are living in a tiny room near our hall. The father is very proud and anxious to conceal his poverty. He was a well-paid official before the fortunes of war expelled him from his position. He has a little property, and has borrowed as much as possible on this security. He is trying now to sell it, but finds the matter difficult. All available clothing has been pawned.

This family attend our meetings, and each has professed conversion. The girl was the first to take this step. The mother longed to become a Chris-

tian also, but was afraid of her husband. One inclement night he came to a poorly attended meeting, and at the close voluntarily sought salvation. His wife could scarcely believe her eyes, and joyfully joined him at the penitent form. They were a happy family circle that night.

He cannot get work. His wife does what little sewing or washing she can get. But the sky is dark. The girl's face grows whiter and more transparent, for she broods over the change so. We encourage them, and help all we can; but their faith is weak, and *there are so many others!*

The little bent woman of sixty-three now passing us looks weary of the struggle for existence. I found myself in her husband's ricksha one day, and drew a sad tale from him. They had two sons, and expected some measure of comfort in their old age, for their sons would take care of them. But one died of consumption, and then this last year the other also was taken from them through the same cruel sickness. The poor old man of sixty-five crawls along the streets drawing his ricksha behind him. It is his only means of livelihood. He is thankful that his old lady can get a bowl of porridge every day.

Do you see that boy with his head covered with sores? His mother died a few months ago, and soon after his father sickened, and has not worked or walked since. The cold floor of a neighbor's outer room is their bed. Until recently they had not even a straw mat between them and the cold clay surface. A small brother of four has been sick for a long time, and lies covered with sores beside the father. They wait in the freezing atmosphere for the elder boy to bring something home from the day's begging or from the porridge kitchen. The elder boy feels the burden, and looks as if he

does not hope for the clouds ever to lift.

I see you took notice of the pale-faced sickly man who—wonder of wonders in this place!—stepped courteously aside to let others pass. One knows instinctively that he is a gentleman. He is well educated, and has had a serious reverse of fortune. He is sick and cannot work. His wife lies in the wretched comfortless place they call home, awaiting death. The awful cough that sometimes brings a crimson stream from her lips tells its own tale.

For him, as yet no gleam of hope pierces the darkness.

That tall gray-bearded man, with a grandfatherly face, has an only son who is a policeman. Misgovernment means hardship for many innocent people. The policeman in China does his work in war and peace, whether under good government, bad, or none, and is wretchedly paid; often for months he is not paid at all. The aged father and mother, two children, and the wife of this particular policeman are needing food and clothing. The industrious little wife is clever with her needle and works hard when she can get extra to do. Her white lips and drawn face bespeak poverty and anxiety. She cannot come to the kitchen, for she cannot spare the time, but grandfather and the little boy can come, and that helps a little.

Notice those girls with some very fine sewing in their hands. They unfortunately receive very little money for their work. They have been trying to sew while waiting for their porridge, but the crushing, and the uncertain light, make such an attempt difficult. They are wondering if it would not be better to stay at home and sew. But this basin of hot porridge is a *sure* meal! It is a problem to them.

As we have chatted, a continuous line of hungry people has slowly passed along. Literally, there have been hun-

dreds of them. Mixed in with such people as I have told you about has been the beggar class — many of whom have settled down to the grime of poverty, and who look for nothing else. Now the thousandth basin is being filled. You look bewildered!

The last guest of the day is approaching. He is a fine-looking old gentleman whose venerable appearance commands respect. His innate good-breeding has prevented his struggling for an earlier place. He also is of the number who once enjoyed wealth, and is an innocent victim of the uncertainties and cruelties of China's political muddle.

His must be a particularly hard road to tread.

Yes, this kitchen is open every afternoon. There are five others supervised by Salvationists in Peking, and one in Tientsin, and it is safe to say that about seven thousand people are fed daily therein. When we think it wise, we send the hot food home; or in some cases dry millet is given.

Here we are on the main road again, among the Mongols and people who are more fortunately situated than those we have been with this afternoon. Your way leads southward. I hope we shall meet again.

TOLSTOI AND TURGENEV¹

EXTRACTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

EVEN before Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi made the acquaintance of Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, he had dedicated to him his 'Cutting of the Forest.' This was the occasion for the first letter exchanged between them, dated October 9, 1855, in which Turgenev expressed his hope that Tolstoi would soon return from the front [in Crimea] and that their personal acquaintance would be of mutual benefit. A month and a half later — on November 23, 1855 — they met. Then a year elapsed, and in December 1856 Turgenev wrote the following letter to Tolstoi:—

'I may now stretch out my hand to you across the chasm between us, which long ago became an almost im-

perceptible crack — we will not even mention it, for it does not deserve attention.'

This letter, however, was written only two weeks after Turgenev had made this confession to Tolstoi: 'There is much in you that ruffles me. . . . However, let's hope that time will turn it all to the best.'

Another letter from Turgenev to Tolstoi, dated late in the same year, throws light on the nature of their differences:—

'I am now convinced that apart from our specific, so to say literary, interests we have but few points of contact. Your entire life is colored by your feeling for the future, mine by my feeling for the past. I cannot possibly follow you, nor can you follow me. I can assure you that I have never suspected you of any meanness or literary jeal-

¹ From *Dni* (Paris Russian-language Moderate-Socialist daily), March 14. Documents quoted from *Ogoniok* (Moscow literary illustrated weekly), February 28