

MIRACULOUS CONVERSION OF AN ILLITERATE CHINESE FARMER

J. Hudson Taylor was a pioneer missionary to the interior of China beginning in 1854. Subsequently, in 1865, he was instrumental in the formation of the China Inland Mission (now OMF International). Mr. Taylor spent the majority of his remaining years ministering to the Chinese people. Few people have been permitted to carry the gospel to such a vast population. The story that follows, an extract from Hudson Taylor in the Early Years, recounts an amazing story of one man's search for peace and how he found it in Jesus Christ.

The Chinese farmer Wang “lay ill and apparently dying, alone in the empty house. The family was all out in the fields, having supplied his needs as well as they could, and there was no one to whom he could turn for help in the great distress of his soul. For Wang regarded death with terror, as introducing the dreaded day on which he must ‘reckon up accounts.’ Somehow, somewhere, he must meet the gods his sins had angered; and the balance to his credit was pitifully small. Whether his heart went out in a longing cry for mercy we cannot tell. At any rate his need was great, and he was dimly conscious of it.

“And then a strange thing happened. In the silence of the empty house he heard himself called. The voice though unknown was so real that he got up and made his way to the door, but on opening it could see no one. Painfully he crept back to bed, only to hear the same voice a little later calling more urgently. Again he rose, and supporting himself by the walls and furniture managed to reach the door. But again no one was in sight. Greatly alarmed, he buried his face beneath the coverlet. This was none other than the approach of death!—the dreaded summons of the King of Hell, at whose bar he must shortly appear.

“And now the voice spoke a third time, and told him not to be afraid. He was going, it said, to recover. An infusion of a certain herb would cure his sickness, and as soon as he was able he was to go into Ning-po, where he would hear of a new religion that would bring him peace of heart.

“All this was so reassuring that Wang determined to do exactly as he was instructed. He persuaded his wife to prepare the medicine, and to the surprise of all began forthwith to recover. Going to Ning-po, however, was another matter. The city was thirty miles away, and Wang had nothing to live on while seeking the new religion. His farm-produce he could not carry with him, and besides it was all needed at home. The only plan would be to work for his living; and finally the farmer set out to support himself by cutting grass along the wayside and selling it to people who had cattle.

“Thus he had managed to earn a scanty subsistence in Ning-po for some time, without finding anything that met the longings of his heart. Under the city-wall and amid the grave-mounds he gathered a supply of grass day by day, which he sold in the city, but no one paid much attention to his questions about religious matters. Still, Wang was sure that what the voice had told him would come true.

“At length one day in a tea-shop—what was that he heard? A simple working-man like himself was leaning across one of the tables, talking with those nearest him.

Something about ‘the Jesus-doctrine’ he said, and about sins being forgiven. Greatly interested Wang drew nearer, and listened for the first time—try to imagine it—to the glad tidings of salvation.

“Neng-kuei’s heart was full that day, and he spoke long and earnestly. Some went out and came in, but the O-zi farmer never lost a word. When Neng-kuei had finished, he introduced himself and asked many questions. Seeing his interest Neng-kuei said:

“‘You must draw water yourself from the fountain. There is a book God has given us in which everything is made plain. You shall have a copy and study the matter fully.’

“‘Alas,’ replied the farmer, ‘I do not know how to read, and I am now too old to learn.’

“‘Far from it!; exclaimed his new-found friend. ‘For with the Glad Tidings an easy method of reading has been brought to us. I did not know a single character when I became a Christian, but now I can read the New Testament quite easily. If you like I will be your teacher. Let us begin at once.’

“Wang needed no second invitation. It did not take long to move his few belongings to the house in which the basket-maker lodged, and before the sun went down he had mastered the first six letters of the alphabet, besides acquiring a much fuller knowledge of spiritual things. And how happy they were over the lesson! It is doubtful whether anywhere in the city there were more thankful hearts, for had not the farmer found the treasure he had been seeking, and Neng-kuei a new jewel to lay at his Master’s feet?”

Later, when introduced “to the farmer from O-zi, Mr. Taylor hardly knew at first what to make of his story. But as time went on the sincerity of the man became apparent to all. He remained in Ning-po for some months, still supporting himself as a grass-cutter, and when he returned to O-zi it was to set apart the best room in his house as a little chapel, in which for fifty years he lovingly and faithfully made known the Gospel.”

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