Servants of the King

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ELEANOR CHESNUT

My life is lived so much among unlovely and unlovable people that I have learned to have great sympathy and great love for them.

—*Eleanor Chesnut*

VI

ELEANOR CHESNUT

On the wall of one of the rooms of the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board, in New York City, is a bronze memorial tablet bearing this inscription:

IN LOVING MEMORY
of the
MISSIONARY MARTYRS
of Lien-chou, China,
ELEANOR CHESNUT, M.D.
MRS. ELLA WOOD MACHLE
AND HER LITTLE DAUGHTER AMY
REV. JOHN ROGERS PEALE
MRS. REBECCA GILLESPIE PEALE
who, for Christ's sake, suffered cruel death at
Lien-chou, China, October 28, 1905.

"They loved not their lives unto the death."
Rev. xii. 11.

"They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain:
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train."

ELEANOR CHESNUT, whose name stands first on the tablet, was born at Waterloo, Iowa, on January 8, 1868. Her father was Irish,

and her mother, whose maiden name was Cain, a Manx woman. The father disappeared about the time Eleanor was born and was never heard of again, and the mother, who had the sympathy and respect of the neighbors, died soon after, when Eleanor was three years old. Eleanor was adopted, but not legally, by friendly neighbors of scanty means, who had no children of their own and found the little girl both a comfort and a problem. Her adopted parents did for her what they could, and the father, looking back across the years, recalls "her loving, kindly ways, her obedience in the family circle, her studious habits, and her unselfish ways." But from the time she first understood her situation and loneliness and poverty, the child felt it keenly and was filled with inward resentment. However tractable she appeared outwardly, she afterward said, she was unhappy and lonely, hating control and longing for the sympathy of a mother's love. Her great happiness lay in her school life, but when she was twelve it seemed that she might have to give up school altogether. At that time she left Waterloo and went to her aunt's in Missouri. The home was a farm in an ignorant backwoods country community where school privileges were of the most primitive character, and the struggle for life in the home was too strenuous to leave anything for the expense of education.

In her new home, however, she heard in a round-about way of Park College. The knowledge of the existence of such an institution, where she might work her way to an education, brought a gleam of hope into her despair. In characteristic fashion she wrote directly to the president of the college, telling him her longings and difficulties, and he wrote to her to come to Parkville. She entered the academy and remained until she had completed the full college course, usually staying there summers as well as winters. Here she found an entirely new and congenial environment. She entered Park College a forlorn, unapproachable girl with many faults of many kinds; she found in Dr. McAfee a true friend, whose patience was inexhaustible and whose influence remained with her always. She also found many warm friends among the students, her surroundings were congenial, and she became as zealously honest as she declared she had been before unreliable.

She was not strong physically, and in those early days of the college, teachers and students alike knew the strain of overwork and undernourishment. "I do not know," writes a friend, "how her personal expenses were met. Her eldest brother was now at work and occasionally sent her a little money, and Mrs. McAfee had clothes given her for needy students, from which store Eleanor was largely

clothed, a charity which she never could receive in any spirit of gratitude, but which she accepted of necessity and with bitter resentment. All these experiences made her in after life full of understanding, gentleness, and tact for others who were poor and forlorn and proud." Outwardly she bore herself bravely and quietly, but her heart was very lonely, and her life had not found yet the great inner secret which brought her later the beauty and peace of a consecrated soul.

Before she left Park College she had yielded to the steady Christian influence of the college and become a member of the Church. She had also gone further and decided to become a missionary. As her reason for the decision she gave simply "desire to do good in what seems the most fitting sphere." She left Park College in the spring of 1888, and went to Chicago to study medicine. To one who offered to aid her, she wrote: "I have had developed in me a liking for medical study, although I did not seriously think of the matter until of late. It seemed to me such an utter impossibility to carry out the design, as I am without means and without friends to assist. But I do trust that I am by divine appointment fitted for this work. My age—twenty-one next January. Oh! I just do long to do this work." The strong power of an unselfish purpose was beginning to work within

her. In Chicago she entered the Woman's Medical College. "During the first year," writes the friend whom she came to know about this time and who became her one intimate friend and correspondent, "she lived in an attic, cooked her own meals, and almost starved. At the close of this first year of medical education, she decided to take a course in nursing as well, and that spring entered the Illinois Training School for Nurses in Chicago for the course, which was then two years. This was a new and trying experience. Eleanor always resented authority which hampered her own methods, also she was careless and inexact in her ways, and training-school discipline was a continual thorn in her flesh. She loved the poor and suffering patients who were under her care, and was tender and untiring in her care, faithful to the last detail where essentials were concerned. After leaving the medical college, she spent a winter in the Woman's Reformatory in South Framingham, Mass., as assistant to the resident physician, a very useful and happy experience, and then took a short course in the Moody Bible Institute."

In 1893 she sent in her formal application for missionary appointment, expressing a preference to be sent to Siam: "Am willing to be sent to whatever location may be deemed fittest. But being asked if I had a preference, my thoughts turned to

Siam. It is a specially interesting field to me since I have always had throughout the country friends and correspondents. If their special need and my desire should coincide it would be for me a delightful circumstance. I do not, however, set my heart on any one place, but rather pray that wherever it may be it will be the appointed one, that what powers I possess may be used to the best advantage." She had prepared herself carefully for the work. She had made her own way through college, medical school, and nurses' training-school, while she worked as a nurse in summer vacations, having nursed Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes in his last illness. She had also taken hospital training, including a good deal of pharmaceutical work, and she had sought to make up for what she regarded as her shortcomings in the knowledge of the Bible and spiritual experience by going to the Bible Institute. Those who knew her believed that she was well fitted for the work.

She was appointed without hesitation as a medical missionary on August 7, 1893, was assigned to South China, and sailed in the fall of 1894 on the steamship *Oceanic* from San Francisco for Hongkong. There was quite a party of missionaries on board. The fifth day out she wrote: "I fear there were very few dry eyes as we caught the last glimpse of her [the tug which had accompanied them out of the bay] and heard the last strains of Auld Lang

Syne. I am glad to say that thus far I have shed no tears. It would have been easy enough, but I know there will be enough to weep over in the future." At the end of the journey she wrote: "I did hate to say good-by to the *Oceanic*. The officers were all so kind that I shall regard them as old friends." As soon as possible after reaching Canton she went on inland to her own station at Sam-kong, a town at the head of the waterways in the northwest corner of the province of Kuang-tung near the border of Hu-nan. The mission station consisted at the time of one family, one self-supporting single woman and one single man. There were a girls' boarding-school, three churches at Sam-kong, Lien-chou, and Lam-mo, and wards for the medical care of women and men, though these were very inadequate. Dr. Chesnut began at once upon arrival the study of Northern Mandarin. Later she tried to acquire also some use of local dialects, almost indispensable for reaching women who know nothing but their own village dialect.

She began her work in her own way, drawing on the inner resources, and not making herself a dependent upon others. "Every morning," she wrote to her friend at home, "I have a choice little time all to my lonesome. First I read the new quotation on the calendar, then the thought for the day in 'Daily Strength for Daily Needs' and finally play

and sing a hymn. I enjoy my faltering attempts at music very much. I can speak the language of my soul quite as effectively in a simple melody as some one else might in a grand sonata. The Thwings have two baby organs and so have loaned me one to have in my room. It is a good companion. Whenever I get restless over Chinese hieroglyphics or a trifle dull I play one of the few only tunes I know. Thus far, I am thankful to say, I have been visited but little by the dread demon of homesickness. There was a time of all-goneness which lasted a week or two and helped to reduce my avoirdupois. But, thank fortune, it is past. I pray that it may not return."

A little hospital for women was prepared. Of this she wrote: "The little hospital is nearly finished. I look out upon it with admiring eyes and fancy myself within it administering 'yarbs' and 'essences' at a great rate. I have at present a young girl in my charge sick with a low fever. How I should like to remove her from her dark room to the hospital and look after her myself. Am afraid she will not recover, though I do hope for her sake and for the work's sake she will. Every patient that I lose counts so much against the work here. I really do labor at a disadvantage. Being able to talk so little, I do not get as clear a history as I might at home. Another

obstacle is the scarcity of drugs. When I want one it never seems to be in the dispensary; and when it is, sometimes I can't find it because many of the bottles are labeled in Chinese. The horrid tin cans instead of bottles! Oh! lots of things one never would dream of. But I don't care for any of these trifles if only I am well and make a success of what I have begun."

She had reached China about the time of the anti-foreign disturbances in the Yang-tzu Valley fomented by Chou-han and his propaganda in Hu-nan. She refers to these conditions in one of her letters: "The missionaries here are all well and the city is peaceful. The interior seems pretty well disturbed. I do hope you won't be frightened by newspaper accounts. I don't think we are in any danger, and if we are, we might as well die suddenly in God's work as by some long-drawn-out illness at home. Miss Johnston writes that the Sam-kongites are usually friendly. I think there is still much hope for China in spite of such expressions as 'an unclaimable lot of heathen savages.' But I am sure that it is our duty as a Christian nation to enlighten the Chinese, and I think very few persons at home realize what idolatry is—how full of cruel superstition China is. They spend their whole existence in fear of some devil or other, and die with it still upon them. I feel especially sorry for the women.

The majority don't know anything aside from combing their hair, doing a few household duties, bearing children, and afterward hanging them upon their backs till they are five or six years of age. They are not expected to be intelligent, and do not expect it themselves. Their lives seem so barren—their tasks no higher than those of a beast of burden—vexed with human passions and endowed with no power to control them."

Within a year after reaching Sam-kong, Dr. Chesnut had an opportunity to go down on a visit to Canton, and while there she studied the extensive medical work of the mission hospital and also seized every chance of rendering service to those in need.

In the spring of 1893 Dr. Chesnut removed to Lien-chou, a more favorable location than Sam-kong, the station having purchased a good site on the river bank opposite the city. "Here I am at last," she wrote, "in the much-looked-forward-to Lien-chou. Monday I had a few of the most important things carried overland. I hear that the boats are on their way. They have divided their cargo with several others and are floating the hospital bed boards and my springs. Won't they be rusty! I only hope they won't try to float the books and the organ. I don't mind being here alone at all." She was living alone at this time at Lien-chou, the five other members of the station still residing at Sam-

kong. She was in the men's hospital, the women's hospital having not yet been built. In the absence of Dr. Machle, who was in charge of the men's hospital, she was conducting all the work. In her letter she writes:

"How many people do you suppose are temporarily in my charge? Two day-school teachers, the hospital preacher, janitor, scribe, doctor, watchman, woman who helps in Sam-kong dispensary, the woman who helps in this dispensary, and the Bible-woman. I have to be after some one continually, but I do hate to get after people. I am conscious of so many failings on my own part that I don't feel equal to attending to those of others.

"I have to perform all my operations now in my bathroom, which was as small as the law allowed before. Now with an operating table it is decidedly full. I do not mind those inconveniences at all, however. I wish I could look forward to as good accommodations for the work next year.

"I really cannot find time to write much these days. There are thirty in-patients in the hospital, most of them fever cases. If they were all of the common class they would serve to keep one person busy, but the fact of belonging partly to the official class accentuates matters. The Lien-shan official, his wife, his cousin, one child, and a whole retinue

of servants are in the hospital, and the wife and child of a smaller official. To-night I have a case of dementia on hand, a Lien-chou official who has ruined himself with opium. He is only thirty-five years of age and has an excellent mind. He came to me this evening to implore protection. He thinks he is continually pursued by demons. I had no place for him but my study. He is sometimes violent and has to be carefully watched. So I am sitting here on guard now. I do hope he will recover, but you have seen enough of these opium cases in the hospital to know what they are like. My patient is now seated at the table reading, but I can see that he is decidedly fidgety. He is a fine, tall man with a clear complexion and fine white teeth. He seems to have a good mind, and it is a pity that he is in this condition. I often think what a different idea you would have of the Chinese if you could see some of these handsome, well-dressed gentlemen. They are so polite that one minute I am filled with awe and the next overcome by the ludicrousness of some child-like freak. There is the making of a great nation in China.

"One of my patients, a wealthy man, the one whose wife I mentioned before, has had a tablet made for me like the one the Lien-shan official and his cousin presented me with. The tablet is to be sent in the morning and I am going to the feast in

the evening. I dread the thought of it. I am so tired. I wish I could sleep a whole day. I shall soon be rested, however. . . . The other night the druggist gave me a prescription which you may find useful, though the ingredients are more difficult to procure in America than in China. You must catch some little rats whose eyes are not yet open, pound them to a jelly, and add lime and peanut oil. Warranted to cure any kind of an ulcer."

How many surgeons would like to amputate a leg without any skilled helper? Of course, it is done, but it is not customary.

During the time above mentioned Mr. Lingle occasionally returned to the station from his almost constant itineration. He came to Lien-chou just when Dr. Chesnut was about to perform such an operation. I believe he held the leg, but Dr. Chesnut did the cutting and sewing.

"The operation was very successful," wrote one of her associates. The man not only did not die on the table, but, better still, he recovered strength. Several times I saw him going about on crutches with a bright smile and good color. But Dr. Chesnut was not satisfied with the results. The flaps of skin which were to fold over and cover the stump did not fully unite. She said little about it, but one day, when she was at my place, I observed that she walked with an appearance

of pain. I asked if she had met with an accident, but she said, 'Oh, it's nothing.' Knowing her temperament, I forbore further questioning, but in a few days took occasion to walk over to Lien-chou, and while there made some inquiries of our good women at the hospital. 'Yes,' said one, nodding her head. 'I should think she couldn't walk well after cutting off so much skin from her leg to put on that boy's leg.' She was determined, at any cost, to make it a success. This was just like Dr. Chesnut. To have spoken further to her about it would have been to let her know that I knew that the flaps had not united. Silent appreciation of her sacrifice was best."

She did not shrink from being alone. She had written some years before of preferring it, but she felt the loneliness none the less, and the burden of responsibility was very heavy for her. In due time new missionaries came to take the place of several who had stayed on the field but a brief time, and older missionaries returned from furlough. The Board did its best to keep the force full. Meanwhile she went on unflinchingly with her work far away in the interior alone.

In 1900 the money was provided for a woman's hospital. She had begun the building in faith with $300 Mexican before she knew that the appropriation had been made by the Board.

The Boxer troubles in the north had sent foreigners in all parts of China down to the coast, but for months Dr. Chesnut declined to go. In August, however, the pressure from Canton became so great that she consented to go down, though she was without fear. In the spring, when the storm was over, she returned. The political conditions were full of perils, however, and the perils did not decrease, and little was needed to touch off a conflagration, as later events showed. The station had always kept free from political entanglements, and that was one great safeguard. But great care was necessary.

This same spring, 1902, she came home on furlough. She returned by way of Europe. Her time at home was spent visiting, doing postgraduate work in medicine, making missionary addresses, and raising over a thousand dollars gold to supplement a good sum raised on the field for a chapel at Lien-chou. She declined a proposal that came to her to go to Hu-nan to take charge of the woman's hospital medical work in that new mission. "I concluded," she wrote, "that it would be a mistake for me to leave Lien-chou. I am acquainted with the people there, their dialect, diseases, faults, virtues, and other points. Then I am so fond of them. I do not believe I could *ever* have *quite* the *same* feeling of affection for any other people. All my

early associations in missionary life are connected with them. Moreover, Lien-chou has been so unfortunate in the matter of losing its missionaries that I fear it would be very discouraging to those at the station. The work is increasing every year. Before I left in the spring there was work enough for twenty missionaries instead of five."

In the fall of 1903 she returned to Lien-chou. Her work was never conceived by her in a narrow sense, however, and her first letter to the Board after her return was a clear and convincing appeal for a building for the boys' boarding-school, from which they were obliged to turn away boys because the old house which was in use was too small. Her second letter was an expression of her hope that another doctor might be sent to take her place so that she could go to Ham-kuang, an important town on the river south of Lien-chou, near the abandoned mission station of Kang-hau.

But she did not go to Ham-kuang. Her next journey was to another city, the city "whose builder and maker is God," and the day of her departure was near. She had some intimation that trouble might be coming. The talk of the streets as she passed by was intelligible to her, and she knew that the general condition of the country was very inflammable.

The new missionaries whom she had been for

RUINS OF THE FIRST CHOW HOSPITAL, CHINA

some time expecting, Mr. and Mrs. Peale and Dr. and Mrs. Machle, who had been at Canton at the mission meeting, arrived at the station on the evening of October 29th, 1905. It was near the close of the Chinese celebration of Ta Tsin, or All Souls' Day, which they were observing with the usual idolatrous ceremonies. A mat shed connected with the celebration had been erected on mission property. The same thing had been done the year before, and when Dr. Machle spoke about it to the elders of the village in which the mission property lay, they agreed that it was improper and would not be done again. When Dr. Machle went to the hospital on the morning of October 28th the shed had been erected on mission property again. He picked up accordingly three of six small cannon which were being fired off and carried them to the men's hospital, less than a hundred yards away. It was a customary Chinese way of indicating that he wished to confer with the elders. They came to see him accordingly and matters were arranged satisfactorily, and the cannon were returned. As the elders went away a mob came from the opposite direction, armed with a sword, a revolver, and sticks. The old man carrying the cannon came back and told the mob that everything was satisfactorily settled, but the rabble had already determined upon trouble, had indeed probably been waiting for an

opportunity for it, and attacked the hospital. Dr. Chesnut had come on the scene during the discussion, and on seeing the turn of affairs, instead of going into the hospital, hurried off, pursued by part of the mob, to report the matter to the Chinese authorities. She reached the police boat on the river and might have escaped in safety, but seeing the peril of the others, returned to Dr. Machle's residence, where all the other missionaries, save Dr. Machle, were assembled—Mrs. Machle, Miss Patterson, Mr. and Mrs. Peale and Amy Machle, a little girl of eleven. The mob increased. The Chinese officials who came were unable to do anything to restrain them, and Dr. Machle joined the other missionaries and all fled by a back door. A ferryman refused to carry them across the river to Lienchou, and they started toward Sam-kong. The mob pursued them so closely, however, that they sought refuge in a Buddhist temple about a mile away, where they hid in a cave opening into the rocks back of the temple. Here all were caught except Dr. Machle and Miss Patterson, who were separated from the others and in deeper recesses of the cave. Mrs. Machle reasoned calmly with the mob until a blow from behind ended her life. The little girl was flung into the river and stabbed and drowned. Mr. and Mrs. Peale, less than forty-eight hours at the station, were slain together. Dr. Chesnut

was killed first. A Chinese eye-witness told of her death:

"I arrived at the temple shortly before noon, just in time to see the mob bringing Dr. Chesnut down the temple steps to the foot of a large tree, and she sat down on a mound at the side. Some young fellows then went up to her and hit her with a piece of wood. It was not a hard blow. Four ruffians then rushed upon her and dragged her from the tree, and getting behind her pushed her down the steep bank leading to the river and threw her into the water, where she lay as though asleep. Then one of the men jumped into the river and stabbed her with a trident three times—once in the neck, once in the breast, and once in the lower part of the abdomen. Other men jumped into the water. She was then to all appearance dead. About ten minutes afterward they brought the body ashore."

The last service she rendered the Chinese was under this tree, when she noticed a boy in the crowd who had an ugly gash in his head. Dr. Chesnut called him to her, tore off a portion of her dress and bound up the wound. It was her last patient. The lad came afterward to the missionaries and showed them the healed wound. Other Chinese boys felt the shame and disgrace of the massacre, and one of them wrote this letter:

"CANTON CHRISTIAN COLLEGE,
"CANTON, CHINA,
"November 20, 1905.

"To the Family and Relatives of Dr. Eleanor Chesnut:

"We are sadly shocked and deeply chagrined to hear of the hideous massacre at Lien-chou. It is indeed a surprise to us. After she and the other missionaries up there have done so much for the benefit of our people, instead of appreciating and feeling grateful for the many kindnesses received, they repaid them in such a cruel and brutal way. This is a shame to our people, a shame to our race! It is a sad and melancholy spectacle to see our people become so degraded and debased mentally; for there is no excuse whatever for their savagery and brutality. When we think of this our hearts break.

"We can imagine your distress and despair at the loss of your loved ones. Believe us, you have our warmest sympathy and prayers for God's blessing upon you all. Your loved one has but gone up to her eternal home to be with the Savior. She is at peace after a life of labor and toil, enjoying her reward. And who knows but that her 'faith unto death' influence may be more to the lives of the people at Lien-chou hereafter than it has ever been before?

"Accept our deepest sympathy and heartfelt apology.

"With the utmost respect we are very sincerely,
"STUDENTS OF CANTON CHRISTIAN COLLEGE."

It was clear, however, that her work was done, her life finished, and she was made ready for the higher service of the life everlasting. All the hardness of the early years was gone, and she was perfected in love at last. The peculiarity and desolation of her girlhood had been transformed into sympathy with all who were in need and complete and Christlike ministry to all suffering. "As a college girl," wrote one of her classmates, "she was somewhat odd and eccentric, but to those who really knew her she was generous, kind-hearted, genuine, and especially true to her friends. She was mentally one of the brightest

girls in the class of '88. As a medical student her eccentricities decreased and her life grew and unfolded until, when she went to China, she went thoroughly trained and fitted for a service of the finest quality. One little incident seems to me to give the key to her whole life as a missionary in China. She heard us talking in our home of a very unlovely old woman who was dependent on the church and who made herself so disagreeable that it was sometimes hard to find money for her support. In the evening she came to Dr. McAfee and said: 'I want to give you this money for that unlovely old woman whom nobody loves. My life is lived so much among unlovely and unlovable people that I have learned to have great sympathy and great love for them.' 'Not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' was the key-note of the life of her Master, and she, too, had learned not only to minister with no thought of return, but to love to do so, which is a far greater thing."

"The terrible news from China brought by our daily papers last week has indeed been sadly verified," wrote another. "It came with especial sadness to us, because of our opportunity two years ago to renew with Dr. Chesnut our friendship of college days in a week's visit she made us on her return journey to China. We shall always be thankful for that opportunity to know the strength and

beauty of her character as developed in those lonely years of devoted service in China. So unassuming and modest were the accounts she gave of her life there, that not till she had gone did we realize the self-sacrifice and heroism underlying those years. How lonely her first years in China were I suppose we at home can never know. But in them she grew sweet and strong and wonderfully sympathetic and Christlike. To know her was a call to higher living, to nobler serving. She has gone home, but who can doubt that her life will blossom and bear fruit in the lives of many of those Chinese women to whom in Christ's name she gave 'all she had'—no mean sacrifice?"

All this perfected character was not lost when Dr. Chesnut went. It was simply transferred to its own higher and nobler sphere. She had come thus to trust God. So also may we. On the day of her death a letter was received from her, in the Board rooms, in which she had quoted these lines:

"Being in doubt, I say,
Lord, make it plain!
Which is the true, safe way?
Which would be in vain?

"I am not wise to know,
Not sure of foot to go,
My blind eyes cannot see
What is so clear to thee;
Lord, make it clear to me.

"Being perplexed, I say,
Lord, make it right!
Night is as day to thee,
Darkness as light.

"I am afraid to touch
Things that involve so much;
My trembling hand may shake,
My skilless hand may break—
Thine can make no mistake."