

CHAPTER 1

BEGINNINGS

A YOUNG GIRL was walking down a quiet street in East London toward the great thoroughfare that runs from east to west through the heart of the city. On her way she looked with interest at one little house which seemed to stand out from the rest. For behind the curtains of that window by the door and those above, she knew that something unusual was going on. History was there being made in a realm that was very real to her, little more than child though she was. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”—how the people in that house not only prayed but lived for this! Her father and friends in the chapel to which she was going knew about it all, and she shared their interest.

It was a young missionary from China who had come to the little house with his wife and children, to prepare for returning to the work they loved—but not alone. Strange to say, they were taking with them a number of other people, all young as they were and of a kindred spirit, to do the impossible as it seemed; for was not that great land closed and barred against both themselves and the message they had to bring? Yet their object was to reach all its inland provinces with the message of God’s redeeming love in

Christ, the message we are charged to give to all men everywhere.

And the strangeness of it all was that they had none of the usual means of support. No missionary society stood behind them, for none was prepared at that time to undertake so hopeless a task. No one was promising them any salary. They were just going out in obedience to the plain command of Christ, trusting Him to be with them and to meet all their need, as He had promised. For to them that word was sufficient, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Thoughts such as these stirred the heart of the girl who passed the house Sunday by Sunday. There, in the sitting-room beside the door, Hudson Taylor and his young wife were often busy writing, writing and praying. For their moments of leisure on Sunday were given to the book that was to accomplish so great a work—the little book that came from burning hearts, about *China's Spiritual Need and Claims*. The woman sat at the table, pen in hand, while he walked up and down the room in prayerful consideration. The thoughts he shared were to move hearts the wide world over and through long years to come, laying abiding foundations for the work to which they had given, in faith, the name of the China Inland Mission. But all that was still in the future, and almost as hidden from them as from the schoolgirl who glanced at their windows in passing. Little did she think that, in coming years, a son of hers was to be one of the bravest pioneers of that same mission, or that his home-call in the prime of life would occasion the heart-cry, "a prince and a great man is fallen among us!"

There was much coming and going in the little house, for the first party of the mission was soon to sail on the ship *Lammermuir*. Among the most helpful of the young

men then in preparation was John McCarthy from Dublin. A few years later, he was to make his remarkable journey on foot right across China, by the dangerous regions of western Yunnan, into Burma. Strange that the son of that young girl—whose story is recorded in these pages—was to follow him in that wild border-land, winning to Christ hundreds of its mountain people. All this and much more was hidden in those days from the leaders of the movement that, without observation from the busy world, was striking its roots deep into great realities. Before the Coborn Road house was finally vacated for the *Lammermuir*, all the young people had been received into temporary homes, while their household belongings went down to furnish the cabin accommodation of 750 ton sailing ship *Lammermuir*. It was all humble and self-sacrificing to a degree! When the last night came, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor were alone in the little house, sleeping on straw in one of the empty rooms, ready to go forward in quiet faith into the unknown future.

Yes, much was to grow out of the happenings at Coborn Road just then, and the prayers through life of that young girl—Annie Rossell Palmer.