

ACCOUNT OF W. T.

VATNE'S DEATH

The Following from Christian Herald Graphically Tells of Chinese Massacre.

Some time ago the Christian Herald made mention of the attack on workers of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission in China. At that time the available information was very brief. We are now enabled, through the kindness of a friend of the missionaries in Barron, Wis., to give the world the real facts concerning the awful tragedy, which resulted in the death of eight foreigners—missionaries and their children—at the hands of a mob in Sianfu, the capital of Shensi. It has taken a long time to get particulars about this case, because those who were rescued had to remain at a military school for a period of six weeks, till the authorities deemed it safe to escort them to the coast. During this long interval the officials prevented any communication regarding the massacre from reaching the outside world.

Sianfu is the capital of Shensi, and is located about a thousand miles from the coast. At this place the mission had erected a preparatory school for the children of missionaries on that field. Some of the parents sent their children a hundred miles by cart to attend this school. At the time of the attack there were six pupils at school, and they were all murdered, together with their beloved "Aunt" Beckman and their faithful teacher, Mr. W. T. Vatne.

The revolutionary spirit sprang up very suddenly, so it was impossible for missionaries in the far interior to reach any of the distant ports for better security; and they put confidence in the firm promise of protection by the revolutionary as well as imperial leaders.

In a recent letter to friends in America, Mr. Beckman tells of the tragedy, and his remarkable escape with his youngest child—a girl four years old. While he was conducting a service in the West suburb, on Sunday forenoon, October 22, 1911, soldiers suddenly rushed by into the city to attack the Manchus in the eastern section. On his way home to the south suburb in the afternoon, Mr. Beckman and his native helper, were robbed of their horses by revolutionary soldiers. But when the matter was reported to an official, he returned the horses to them, bidding them depart in peace.

"This same Sunday, toward evening," writes Mr. Beckman, "the natives at our station felt disturbed and wished to leave, when they saw flames of burning houses and heard the tumult of war in the Manchurian quarters. We talked of leaving our station for a place where we could feel more secure. We came to the conclusion that it would be as safe to remain as to flee. Mr. Vatne suggested that he and one of the Chinese would keep watch that night, while the rest of us tried to get some rest. About midnight, Mr. Vatne aroused us by a sharp rap on the window. We made haste to get the children ready, and hurried downstairs. The gate to our compound was already set afire, so we rushed to the back yard hoping to escape over the wall by means of a ladder. I heard gun-firing even from that direction, and I feared we were already surrounded by the mob. The ladder had been removed by our native helpers when they escaped, and in the dark it could not be found. Mr. Vatne and my wife went into the house to take along some things of necessity, while I managed to get a wheelbarrow, a piece of timber and a rope to the wall, which was twelve feet high.

"Mr. Vatne placed himself on the wall, and I began helping the children up. We had got Selma over, and Oscar was on the wall. Just then Selma gave a frightful scream, and Mr. Vatne jumped down to her. I heard two shots and through fright at what they might have done, I almost dropped little Ruth. But I placed her on the wall and we called to Mr. Vatne several times. Ruth screamed frightfully, and I took her down. Oscar also came down. I did not dare to put any more of the children over the wall. I got hold of a pickax, and we took refuge in a shed close by, where I began working a hole through the wall; but it had soon to be given up, for the gate was burned down, and the mob entered. We heard them smash the windows of the house. They took what they wanted and set the house afire. The same was done in the schoolroom close by us. We kept as quiet as possible, so as not to draw their attention to where we were. With our youngest child in my arms, I sat praying. The children gathered round me. We gave ourselves over to the will of God. One of the looters entered a little shed close by us, but did not observe us." We consulted what to do, in case they should find us, which my wife greatly feared would happen. I

suggested that we keep close to the sides—that if the door should be opened they might not observe us and perhaps would leave. If they break the door," said my wife, "we must flee for our lives." We continued praying. It appeared as though we might be left alone, as the mob began to withdraw. But suddenly, with three heavy blows, the door was smashed. Mrs. Beckman rushed out, and the children and I followed. We hurried past the burning houses without encountering any of the mob, but a voice behind us called out, "Now they run!" When we came to the front gate, I was ahead of the others. When I saw the mob, I hesitated, because, with a four-year-old child in my arms, I could see no way of pressing through the crowd, who, with weapons and torches were thirsting for our blood. The light from the burning houses and the voices behind made it impossible to turn back. Mrs. Beckman, followed by the children, rushed past me. We all got into the crowd at the same time, and I could no longer see what happened to the others. I jumped over a ditch, that if possible I might get to the west side of the mob. Soon I received a heavy blow on the right shoulder. A good many took after me, and knock by knock struck my legs. Noticing that the blows became less frequent, I had hopes of outrunning my pursuers. Finally, I had but one following me, and his knocking did not reach me. I ran past a cross road, and glanced round to see if I could detect some safe hiding place, because I realized that I should drop if I could not soon get some rest. I was now at a low orchard, flooded with water, surrounded by high banks, and I jumped into the water. I noticed that the east side was quite dark, and I crept up near the bank there where my pursuer could not see me. When the others came up, he assured them that the one who got away was a man, that he carried a child, and that he saw him jump into the water. They were hunting for me, but no one dared to come down from the bank into the water. They cursed my ability to run. The other foreigners did not get away. It was said; and when I heard this, it was only the fact that I had a child to save that kept me from going back to die with the others.

"Mrs. Beckman and our little Ruth (age seven) and Hulda Bergstrom (age eleven) had fallen near the gate. Hilda Nelson (age fifteen) had reached a short distance westward and tried to escape among the grave mounds near by, where she was struck down. George Ahlstrand (age ten) must have tried to follow me, because his lifeless body was found near the cross road.

"I prayed the Lord to guide me. My pursuers called to some of the others to bring torches; but I was still too tired to move. Soon the torches were there, and one man called out, 'There he sits,' and he threw his pole at me in such a way that it struck me on the arm and little Thyra on the legs. Then I rose up and walked out into the water. Large pieces of mud struck my head but caused no injury. Luckily, there were no stones around there. Soon I understood that they could no longer see me, for they began asking each other which way they went. Their own torches blinded their eyes while my way became light. I could see where to go, could observe their movements, and could hear their speech. They hurried to surround the orchard and put guards at each place where they thought it possible for a person to climb up.

Some said 'he went here' and others 'there.' I prayed God to help me up at the north side. I crept down by a tree and sat down in the water, and the cold water made my swollen feet more comfortable. All fear was now gone. As soon as I noticed that none were on the north side, I rose and went toward that way. I splashed in the water as I walked along, which they must have heard, because two men came around with their torches. Therefore I had to creep down in the water again self close to a tree so they could while they passed by, keeping my not see me. As soon as they were back to their starting place, I rose up. I had prayed for guidance, and the star of hope shone in my heart. After standing a while to let the water run from my clothes; I walked slowly toward the north edge, and gained a foothold on a heap of mud. I could hardly lift Thyra on top of the bank above, and when she was placed there she began sobbing. Then I had to take her down. I told her if she began crying, those ugly men would come and hit us again; but if she would be quiet I should soon be on the bank with her. She seemed to understand, and ceased weeping. Having again placed her on the bank, I made an attempt to get up, but only tore down some mud which rolled into the water.

"How I prayed God to help me! I tried again, and really got up. No one was after me, and I picked up

my darling—all I had left on earth—and started off toward the north. I did not look back toward the burning houses—it was sad enough to know that my beloved wife and darling Ruth lay slain there, together with the other children. I thought of Mr. Vatne and Selma, wondering if they were alive, and where they could be. I continued walking unhindered and arrived at a back gate of the mission station in the west suburb. As soon as I rapped and spoke my name I was let in. The friends here knew something about our dangerous situation, as one of our native helpers had fled here when the mob approached. After answering their eager questions, to the effect that the little girl and myself were probably the only ones who had escaped, tears were shed by my fellow workers and by the Christian Chinese. Dry clothes were given us, and the kind friends took charge of Thyra. A place was given us to rest, but I could not rest. I went outside with others, for we feared that even here the mob would come. While the excitement still was great, I could bear up under the heartrending sorrow that had befallen me; but toward morning, my feelings began to claim their right; of woe, sorrow, regret, fear, restlessness—on what a change from the calmness and courage I had realized in the midst of the worst of it. Also little Thyra began to weep bitterly. I began praying, and through prayer the child was comforted; but as soon as I stopped praying she began crying. This led me to continue praying, and anew I yielded myself to the Lord, to live or die, just as he would have it. The friends gathered round, and we had a season of prayer, and our strength renewed in the presence of the Lord.

"From the military school located just across the way from the mission station, we were informed that we were in great danger, because the mob at the south suburb had decided to come here to the west suburb to continue their violence. No guards were to be had, since the soldiers in the city were fighting the Manchus, who were mercilessly slaughtered. Most of the natives who used to be around us had fled. Three of those who remained procured muskets from the military school, and acted as guards before our gate. The instructor from the military school invited us to the compounds of his school for better protection.

"After coming here we heard rumors regarding Mr. Vatne and my daughter Selma. Some reports said they were killed, others that Mr. Vatne was still alive, bound to a tree. The authorities did not permit any of us foreigners to go in search of them, but the native Christians did their best to locate them. We felt an awful anxiety for two days, until we learned that they had been murdered by the mob after having fled eight miles toward the mountains. It is said that the revolutionary leader stamped in anger when he heard what had happened to us, saying, 'Are our Chinese people really so foolish that they want to draw the revenge of foreign powers down upon us through such outrageous attacks?' Three of the leaders who planned and instituted the attack on us have been punished by death, and their bodies hung up as a warning to others. Some of the officials say more of the culprits will yet be punished, and they try to comfort me as best they can; but there is no comfort save in the Lord and in submission to him."

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