Mrs. W. E. Smith Called to Higher Service

By The Rev. K. J. Beaton, B.A., Chengtu, West China.

Grace Olivia Smith, the youngest daughter of the late William Edward and Maria Young, was born at Rockdale, Peterboro Co., in 1869. She received her education in the Norwood Public School, Peterboro Collegiate and Ontario Ladies’ College. In the year 1895, she began to teach, and soon afterward married W. E. Smith, a newly-ordained minister of the Bay of Quinte Conference. The following year they sailed for West China, the third party of Canadian Methodist missionaries to volunteer for that far-off field. For twenty-six years she gave herself with an almost reckless abandon of time and talent to the people whom she helped. On June 27th, 1922, in Toronto, only one week after arriving home on her third furlough, the Master called her to that higher and more perfect service for which her life had so eminently fitted her.

Such in brief compass is the record of a most unusual life. It should never be forgotten that to be a missionary in West China was a very serious undertaking, when Dr. and Mrs. Smith volunteered. The journey inland was by houseboat, in peril of rapids and robbers all the way. Arrived in Szechwan, the upper classes viewed the missionary with ill-concealed contempt, the lower classes with open and expressed hostility. The atmosphere was saturated with suspicion. The whole environment radiated hostility. Dr. and Mrs. Smith were appointed to Junghaisen as the first resident missionaries. No foreigners had ever lived there, and a large element of the population of this classic, educational centre were determined that none ever would live in their midst.

Weary months were spent in purchasing property—months of endless bargainings and Oriental trickery, months of suspense, and frequent disappointment. Living in a made-over Chinese house, one would have expected the young missionary’s wife to show signs of discouragement, but she never did. She was a real missionary. The sense of her calling was immediate and personal, her faith in the Gospel was absolute, and her love and devotion to the Chinese who misunderstood and persecuted her, was apparently unbounded. She accepted the promises of the Word of God absolutely. During her missionary lifetime her prayer room was a dynamic centre for the whole community. She made long itinerant journeys side by side with her husband, to open new market towns and villages. She established a kindergarten, and, later, primary schools for the boys and girls. She helped in the dispensary and with the sick; for Dr. Smith was also the only physician in the city. She called upon the rich in their homes and entertained them in her own. She gathered the women into classes and began a movement, which has resulted in the most successful Bible Training School for women in our West China field. Her Sunday afternoon meetings for women became the chief centre of inspiration in the drab and monotonous lives of her Chinese sisters. Gradually the Mission staff increased, the Mission plant was built up and the Chinese Church grew in numbers, in intelligence, and in strength, but in and through all this expansion which has given Christianity a grip upon Junghaisen and ripened the whole non-Christian community there for garnering into the Kingdom, in a way which is not yet true of any other of our stations, Mrs. Smith’s prayers, optimism and unconquerable faith were always and everywhere apparent.

When the news of her death reaches her people in the heart of the Celestial Empire, there will be a great memorial service. Among the hundreds of Christians and their friends who crowd the church, there will be representative women from the highest and most exclusive aristocracy of this old historic city. They will mourn for her as a sister beloved, who led them to Jesus and filled their empty lives with hope for this world, and the world to come; there will be Bible women who have caught something of her spirit and are now holding aloft in the spiritual and intellectual darkness, the torch of that Eternal Light which first shone for them in her; there will be a great group of the toilers, who have found in her Christ a mental and spiritual stimulation far transcending their fondest dreams, and they will mourn her sincerely, for they loved her truly. Twenty-six years ago she and her husband knocked ‘in vain at their hearts and homes for admission. To-day an indigenous Christian church clothes itself in mourning for a teacher beloved. Surely it was eminently fitting that, when she realized that the night was upon her, she should call her daughter into her presence, and ask her to sing:

“The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended,
    The darkness falls thy behest.”

A Tribute

On a quiet afternoon in June, just a week after reaching Toronto, Mrs. W. E. Smith, of West China, one of our best-known missionaries passed to her Eternal Home.