

CHINA'S MILLIONS

THE ORGAN OF THE CHINA INLAND MISSION

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Robert Morrison.

Pioneer of Protestant Missions to China.

BY MARSHALL BROOMHALL.

SURROUNDED as we are to-day by threatenings on every hand, by political perplexities and economic hardships, it is a good thing to look back and recall God's wonders of old. It is all too easy to think that our trials are unprecedented, and our circumstances more inimical to the progress of the Gospel than in the days of our fathers. Time has blunted our sense of the troubles of former days and of the difficulties faced by the pioneers. But though the scale of happenings to-day may be greater, they are not necessarily a greater challenge to faith. The Church has always been faced with the impossible apart from God, and the study of past triumphs is one of the best tonics for the troubled heart.

'I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High,' wrote the Psalmist. 'I will make mention of the deeds of the LORD; for I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate also upon all Thy works, and muse on Thy doings.' In all this, God's servant set us a good example, and we purpose in this article to recall some of the mountains of difficulty which flowed down before Robert Morrison at the presence of the LORD.

Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, died at Canton on August 1st, 1834, just one hundred years ago. William Carey had died at Serampore on June 9th, a few weeks earlier, and by a strange coincidence the monopoly of the East India Company came to an end in the spring of the same year. Both Carey and Morrison had experienced the powerful opposition of this great company. 'Intoxicated or demented by the very political success which God had permitted to it, the East

India Company had become the most intolerant enemy of Christian Missions.' Thus wrote Dr. George Smith.

The word that supported Carey, when faced with possible expulsion from India, was, 'Look unto Abraham your father . . . for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many.' And the promise was fulfilled. It was a like faith that sustained Morrison from start to finish. Owing to the East India Company's hostility he could not sail for China on any British vessel. It was in a ship flying the Stars and Stripes that he journeyed from America to Canton, and armed with a letter of introduction from the American Secretary of State to the American Consul in China. This was a delicate arrangement, but under God it thwarted the powerful antagonism of the Company. And as Carey in India had to find shelter under the Danish flag to carry on his work, so for a time had Morrison in Canton to live under the American flag. How precarious his foothold was may easily be forgotten. If it had not been the LORD who was on his side, his stay would have been speedily cut short.

Morrison was surrounded on all hands by foes to the spread of the Gospel. The Chinese Emperor had told Lord Macartney in 1793, 'The propagation of the English religion is a matter which can by no means be allowed.' Morrison was beset with hindrances and limitations. 'The people of Europe,' he wrote, 'have no idea of the difficulties of residence here, or of obtaining masters to teach. The Chinese are prohibited from teaching the language under penalty of death.' But with an earthenware lamp for a light, and a folio volume of Matthew Henry's Com-

mentary for a shield, he sat at his books and made himself master of the language.

For most of his life he lived the life of a captive. The limits of the area reserved for foreign occupation at Canton were about 330 yards fronting the river, with a depth of 230 yards. But more than half of this was covered with buildings, and exercise upon the river was prohibited. Nor might sedan chairs be used, and no foreign woman, be she wife or friend, might so much as set a foot upon the soil. For nearly twenty-seven years, with only one furlough, this confined space was Robert Morrison's chief place of residence. When the East India Company's fleet had sailed, a visit to Macao was possible and indeed compulsory.

Through all his sojourn in Canton, Morrison was opposed by the Chinese Government. Within five years of his arrival an Imperial edict made it a capital offence to print any books in Chinese on the Christian religion. The Chinese officials broke into his printing room and carried off his type and threatened his assistants. It was no wonder that he said he felt 'lonely and in constant apprehension.' 'But,' he adds, 'I hope the Almighty Arm which has been my defence hitherto will still preserve me from all evil.'

And the Roman Catholics at Macao became his enemies too. When staying in that centre he lived in fear of Chinese and Portuguese alike. Owing to protests made by the Portuguese Vicar-General, the East India Company forbade Morrison to use his printing press in Macao. 'The Select Committee desire you to suspend the issue of any further publications from the printing press in your home at Macao.' So ran their decision. Now the preaching of the Gospel at that time was impossible in China, so the printed page was Morrison's only channel for spreading the truth. So against this 'threefold despotism' of Priest, Portuguese and English authorities, Morrison made a spirited and able protest, and proved himself a formidable antagonist when vital principles were at stake.

'I protest against the whole proceeding,' he wrote, 'as an act of usurped authority, tyranny and oppression on the part of both Portuguese and English, at the bidding of a Popish priest.' But not content with an expression of dissent, he carried the war into the enemies' ranks. With uncompromising firmness he argued for the liberty of the press in the columns of the *Canton Register*. Quoting the New French Charter which said, 'All Frenchmen have the right to publish and print their own opinions: the censorship is for ever abolished,' he argued from history and from Scripture, the natural rights of man. Beneath Morrison's quiet exterior there slumbered uncommon resolution, heroic determination, combined with an unsuspected capacity. He was a well-read man, and knew how to defend his position. Quoting St. Peter's words, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto GOD,' he closed one of his articles with the words, 'We therefore conclude that the laws against speaking, and writing, and printing, may be disobeyed with a good conscience. Tyrants may punish, but GOD will approve.'

Though alone and defenceless, he stood firm. It was the spirit of Athanasius, or of the Scriptural *Anti-pas* (against all), God's faithful witness, a willingness to stand against the world.

When Morrison had completed the translation of the New Testament, it appeared as though his life's work

was to be cut short. The news of this translation reached the ears of 'the Honourable the Court of Directors' of the East India Company in London. And they knowing that the Chinese Government had interdicted any such publications, and fearing for their own trade if the authorities were displeased, sent out an order to Canton directing that Morrison be dismissed. As the only way to secure a foothold in Canton, he had become their interpreter. But Morrison was not the man to flee, and he made such a dignified yet courteous reply that it was referred home for new instructions. Meanwhile higher powers, both human and divine, were at work. The British Government had determined to dispatch another embassy to China under Lord Amherst, and for this mission, Robert Morrison became indispensable as interpreter. And so it came to pass, in the providence of God, that instead of being dismissed, the President of the Company wrote and said, 'I conclude you will be the principal person in the mission!' Thus in this time of extremity, the words of the Magnificat were again shown to be true, namely, that God's mercy is on them that fear Him, that He scattereth the proud in the imagination of their heart, and exalteth them that are of low degree.

Such were some of the difficulties which Robert Morrison met, and overcame, by the grace of God, and Divine providence. There is no need here to detail Morrison's achievements. His outstanding tasks were the completion of a Chinese-English Dictionary, for the printing of which the East India Company spent £12,000; the translation of the whole Bible, in parts assisted by William Milne, for which the British and Foreign Bible Society spent several thousand pounds, a vocabulary of the Cantonese dialect, and a grammar of the Chinese language.

Though Morrison's version of the Scriptures, like Wycliffe's and Tyndale's English renderings, have been superseded by revised versions, the abiding legacy of his life remains. And not least of his bequests is the example of a triumphant faith in God, in face of terrible odds; his unwearying labours in accomplishing a Herculean task, his unflinching resolution against almost overwhelming opposition; and his uncomplaining spirit when melted by bereavement and painful misunderstandings. Such was the man who laid the foundations of the Protestant Church in China, and his life has its lessons for us in the extension of that Church to-day.

'Ye are My witnesses, said the LORD, and I am GOD. Yea, since the day was I am He, and there is none that can deliver out of My hand; I will work, and who can hinder it?'

C.I.M. Prayer Meetings.

The Weekly Prayer Meeting is held every Wednesday evening at 6 o'clock at the China Inland Mission, Newington Green, N.16.

The Weekly Prayer Meeting in Glasgow is held at 16, Belmont Street, off Great Western Road, W.2, at 8 o'clock every Friday evening. The Ladies' Monthly Prayer Meeting is held every third Tuesday of the month at 3 o'clock at 16, Belmont Street, Glasgow.

The Weekly Prayer Meeting in Edinburgh is held every Thursday afternoon at 3 o'clock at 19, Mayfield Gardens.

Prayer Meetings in Belfast are held on the first Monday of each month at 59, Fitzwilliam Street, and on the third Friday at 4, Ashgrove Park, both at 8 p.m.