

Franklin Ohlinger, "**Hope for Mission,**"

Thought, Words, Deeds and Other Sermons (Seoul: Trilingual Press, 1893): 97-106.

And Peter opened his mouth, and said of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. (Acts x: 34.)

It is well to place this text side by side with John III, 16. We should study not only what God has done *for* man, but also what He has done *in* man. People would have us pity them because of what they are pleased to call their mental inability to believe the essential doctrines of Christianity. They delight in posing as the victims of a profoundly critical judgment. For such, arguments are worse than vanity and words of pity more than cruelty. "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." They would also convince us that the heathen are unable to become Christians, and that missionary work is hopeless. They question in the one case the adaptability of the Gospel to man, in the other the adaptability of man to the Gospel. The friends of missions have implicit faith in both. The missionary is not blind to the thousand peculiarities, oddities and vices, which, when viewed through our prejudices and our ideas of purity make the heathen appear to us as the vessel full of four-footed beasts, creeping things and fowls of the air appeared to Peter's Jewish mind. Probably if there had been but one or only a few of the proscribed objects Peter would never have questioned the "Rise, kill and eat;" but when the whole catalogue is suddenly thrust upon his vision he cannot but express his fear that there is a mistake somewhere, and only after receiving the threefold assurance, and after seeing a living illustration of the blessed truth did he "perceive that God is no respecter <97/98> of persons." If the heathen appeared to us only in the peculiarity of their social customs, their national pride and their deep-seated superstition our faith would rise to enthusiasm but when he comes before us full of treachery, avarice, individual pride and the whole list of nameless vices, we may be tempted to doubt whether Christianity is really intended by divine mercy for him. We not only need a general belief that Christ died for all men, but our faith should assume a very definite form; we should feel when the heathen stand before us that the Holy Spirit has led them to us as well as us to them. We should have as much faith in their call to salvation as in our call to the mission field. In other words as a devoted worker in the cause of missions has said, we must have faith in humanity. This is the burden of this tenth chapter of the Acts.

But let us come to a clear understanding of what we mean by having faith in humanity. We do not mean by it that there is no danger of casting the pearl before the swine, in these heathen lands, nor do we mean that we should be governed by that sickly sentimentalism that would have us go through the land sandwiched between a baptismal font and a bag of silver, that we should leave the calm judgment and healthy common sense that guide us in other lands and callings, locked away in our Saratoga trunk until we take passage for home. We should, on the contrary feel deeply that every mistake we make in our dealings with the heathen is a sin against the cause of missions and is the result, either of a desire to make missionary work easy or to display glowing reports of success.

We are also far from the Pelagian doctrine that there is a natural power in man to renovate himself when we urge faith in humanity. What we mean is simply this, that the grace can make the heathen as honest and as pure as <98/99> we are, that a convert

who has believed in Christ, who has read his Bible and given and suffered as much for Christ as we have is usually worthy of the same confidence we extend to each other. A young missionary told me that a gentleman of the foreign community had declared his conviction that a certain native preacher who had been in the ministry over thirty years, whose grandchildren were then attending Sunday School, was an honest man. I tried to get word back to the gentleman that I had as much confidence in him as he had in the native preacher.

But the point I wish to emphasize today is, that not everything in the heathen mind and in the structure of heathen society is unalterably opposed to the Gospel. I believe that we often allow things to discourage us that ought to have the opposite effect. We should bear in mind:

1st. That the heathen are by nature as able to believe in Christ as we are. That faculty of their being which believes and doubts is the same in them as in us, and God has in his infinite goodness so shaped their environment that amid all the prevailing fraud, error and deception, this faculty is kept in daily exercise. Faith is the grand motor hidden away under the whirring machinery of heathen society. It puts the hand to the plow and plants the rice in Korea just as it breaks the prairie and plants the corn in America. It bides the weary sowing and brings the joyful reaping. It launches the clumsy junk as well as the mighty steamship. It swallows the indescribable nostrum of the ubiquitous quack as well as the latest remedy approved by medical science. There it listens to the ravings of spiritualism and the mutterings half-demented vagrants; here to the drivelling idiot, suicide and mountebank. It cheerfully bears away toward old age and decrepitude, ever confident that the youth now rolling the <99/100> stone up the mountain where it has slipped from the hands of unnumbered toilers will by and by learn both wisdom and filial piety. And thus it persists in calling old age the greatest of blessings. Faith operates in Asia very much as it does in Europe and America; committing the same follies and yet keeping the social machine in motion and the race above the sod. Today it scrutinizes evidence and feels its way, a step at a time; tomorrow you may see it all oblivious of reason, rushing headlong into error, holding on to the senses as the only reliable guide. Of course this is not saving, or justifying faith; it does not tell me that the briers and stones that disfigure the surface of the field are imaginary; it does not predict an easy or early harvest, but it does tell me that Asiatic soil is congenial to Christian seed-sowing, that the heathen have eyes to see and that it is worth our while to point them in the right direction.

But our Asiatic heathen are, secondly, religious people. From Hinduism, with its deep philosophy and debasing, sensual religious practices, through materialistic China, where you call sift the dust out of the sacred ancestral bones, down to our own religiously easy-going Korea you find a well-expressed belief in the existence of the spirit-world and the immortality of the soul. While as nations arid communities they all and ever seem to be only after the dollars, we occasionally meet one who reminds us of Luther on the streets of Eisenach or of the mystics telling the deep things of God. They are far gone into fatalism, yet the shred of their garment they leave behind at every mountain crossing witnesses of a faith in an overruling providence. In the higher classes, though far gone into rationalism, we never meet the pronounced atheist. French philosophy has the inevitable claim to the father hood of this moral monstrosity. Amid all his unbelief and crooked belief <100/101> our Asiatic heathen is still a worshipper, and therefore a thinker, and therefore a man! Some good people seem to think that if all

vestiges of religion among a people could be first destroyed the mission of Christianity would be more readily accomplished. They seem to think with Voltaire that religion is a fraud committed by the wise and powerful on the weak and ignorant. I would point such to a fact expressed by Baron von Bunsen concerning the Chinese language. He says: "To express mind--thought itself, that which predicates, there is absolutely no term whatever." Not all Chinese scholars would admit this to be correct; yet it is so sadly near the truth as to give us in China the Term Controversy. Now let us suppose that the Chinese life were as void of religion as their language is of a term for mind and thought and we should have among our missionaries not only a Term Controversy, but a Prayer controversy, an Immortality controversy, a controversy on every essential of religion. Let us thank God for the religion we find among the heathen and hope that they will hold their own until compelled to yield to the Gospel. A solitary star in the firmament gives more assurance than the dark thunder-cloud growling like an angry lion in his sleep. To one who knows how few (comparatively) Christianity has reached, how little it has penetrated the heathen masses, it is anything but encouraging to be told that the heathen are forsaking their gods and that not a new temple is to be seen. When the Phocians plundered the temple at Delphi Grecian swords went to the highest bidder Patriotism and religion fell together. If the decay of heathen temples is owing neither to the presence of Christianity, nor to poverty, we can rest assured that it is due to the unusual wickedness of the people. The great religions by which we are surrounded are so many magnetic currents drawing these tossed and erring races from <101/102> the breakers all about them. They will never bring them into port, they will never bring them onward, but by the help of God they will keep them afloat till the Captain of our salvation come. Bid them not cast their compass overboard, though the delicate needle tremble at the point directly opposite the right one, bid them take courage and work, and pray on, the life-boat is seen above the billows and He who holds the helm also holds the waters in his hand. Friends, let us recognize the office of the great ethnic religions and look upon them as our first "helpers" in the work. The man we read of in this tenth chapter of Acts was neither Jew nor heathen, but his religion, such as it was, led him early to the Saviour. Our Asiatic heathen also have a religion.

Thirdly. Another encouraging fact I would briefly mention is the devotion of the Asiatic heathen to literature. Bishop Ames, in one of the last sermons he preached, exclaimed: "Remember that the greatest and wisest nations of the world are Christian. Brother Ohlinger take that with you to China!" The Bishop's words led me to the realization of a yet more important and far-reaching fact, namely that the bulk of the world's literature is Christian. I am glad that in various ways the portals are flung back, and the reading heathen world is admitted freely to our literary wealth and wonders. In all this I am well aware that I am venturing on an ocean that floats both pirates and merchantmen, that all around us are wanton divers who would fain cut our anchor-cable. There are critics of people calling themselves Christians, of organizations calling themselves churches, but the critics of the Christ, the critics of the Church are few and harmless. When we humble ourselves that Christ may be exalted, when we thank the critics for telling us after all only how wicked we are how holy the Saviour is, for telling us how little *we* resemble Him <102/103> then do we find in many of them our best friends and the fiends of Jesus. Many of them seem to be attacking my religion and are in reality only attacking my want of it. I read their books with as little harm as I read the account of the apostolic quarrel about the upper seats in the kingdom of God. Peter's

denial and Judas' betrayal do not make me think less of Jesus, but less of myself. I wish the heathen knew what elevated ideas some of the enemies of the churches have of Christ, how low they lay *us* in the dust and how high they exalt our Master. Christianity criticized for its want of Christianity! Let the heathen hear the paradox. Let them feel the force of it, as Christian nations feel it. The results of teaching these Asiatics our Western languages (I used to argue when it was a sin in the eyes of some) may not be entirely satisfactory for a generation or two, but so sure as light is better than darkness so sure is knowledge better than ignorance. Certain corpses were found in the Catacombs, apparently without a mark of decay upon them, yet what was the surprise of the disc0vers when they saw them fall into dust before their eyes. What the tomb had not accomplished in centuries, the fresh air did in a moment. So let the heathen bring their ancient philosophies and boasted learning into the bracing atmosphere of modern thought and they will not only be cured of their self-sufficiency, but will have to own themselves in the silent grip of an influence of which they had never dreamt.

Finally, I would mention as a cause for great encouragement the appreciation of pure devotion and self-sacrifice found among the heathen. There is much counterfeit hero-worship among them, to be sure; much make-believe thankfulness; much fine rhetoric on deeds nobly done. Your first kindness is almost sure to receive a smile only, mistaken kindness will reap contempt, and goody-goodliness will rouse the very devil <103/104> of deceitfulness in them; but the kindness that imposes a life-burden on them and helps then carry it is sure of overwhelming tokens of gratitude. If you will pardon the colloquialism: They will paint you red. But they have a deep-seated prejudice against everything that looks unselfish; they want to know the motive and whether it is not only a passing freak. They take it for granted that it is some kind of a deception and meet it with the same weapon. Sympathy that expresses itself in the shape of good advice is often the only kindness they will trust, a good scolding is more appreciated than a good position. Gradually they come to realize that you have no axe to grind, no favors to ask of them, no long list of converts to drum together for a visitor to admire, no work or method to boom in the papers; gradually they come to see in your example a new standard of self-sacrifice—not that of a son toiling day and night for the comfort of those to whom he owes his being—not that of the daughter subjecting herself to the momentary pain caused by cutting the flesh from her arm to save the life of her parent--not that of the patriot committing suicide because his advice is not heeded—they come at last to see that standard that measures all these into nothingness, the holy one dying for the unholy, the creator for the creature, the king for the rebel—Christ for the world. Where this standard is once clearly discerned you must destroy mind before you can destroy its influence. It will have more glorious monuments throughout the land than tablets of wood and arches of granite, the more enduring monuments of holy lives, spent in the service of humanity, monuments on which the word duty has no meaning, on the dazzling brightness of which we can see but the one insignia: “The Love of Christ cOnstraineth me.”

There are new faces and fresh heartbeats among us. Soon <104/105> they will be in the thick of the fight. We need not tell them all the difficulties and disappointments in store for them. We would rather bid them take the telescope of faith and look long and steady. ...