

WHAT PROGRESS IN CHINA ?

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HEATHENISM is stationary. Christianity forever aggressive. Heathenism is not only stationary; it is a stagnation, a desert without an oasis. Christianity is the onward flow of a mighty current, and "everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh."

Seen from a distance, heathenism seems to many minds to have certain ethical qualities to which the word "desert" is not strictly applicable. To know heathenism we must live in heathen lands. Europeans travel in Asia: they never choose to reside there. We need to come into intimate, vital relation with the political, social, moral fabric of heathenism to appreciate the purifying, life-giving power of Christianity.

Take a single instance. China is numerically the mightiest nation on earth. The teachings of Confucius have shaped the character of the people for more than two thousand years. No better ethical code exists outside of the Bible. But China has not progressed one inch in a thousand years. Century after century presents the same grinding despotism, the same oppression of woman, the same degrading worship of idols; and no heathen country on earth presents a different record. It always has been so, and forever would be so, but for the aggressiveness of that kingdom whose foundations and superstructure belong to "those things which cannot be shaken."

To the apathetic spectator the beginnings of Christianity in India and China compare but faintly with the glorious period when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Hundreds of millions have never even heard of the knowledge of salvation. "What of the night?" is heard in many quarters, and he knows nothing of the facts who cannot answer truthfully, "The morning cometh." For one thing is as sure as starlight, and that is that there is no morning for any nation on earth apart from Christianity. But there is another fact, susceptible of easy proof, that the darkness is passing away in every land where Christianity has gained a foothold.

Twenty years ago not half of the provinces of China had a single chapel. Now every province in the empire is occupied. In 1807 Morrison reached China, and battled for twenty-four years in isolation, and baptized his first convert at a solitary spot, fearing the persecution of the authorities. Contrast that day with the present and who will deny that the darkness is passing away?

More than two thousand foreign and native missionaries reach yearly hundreds of thousands of idolators, under imperial toleration of the faith once bitterly persecuted. Local perse-

cutions will undoubtedly occur, but there is not a shadow of probability of any general uprising against the doctrines now known by the wisest men in China to be the cause of the great prosperity of those countries where these teachings are almost universally accepted,

Again, it may be most truthfully affirmed that never in the history of the world were so many doors flung wide open for evangelistic effort. Tens of thousands of villages and great cities, where the voice of the preacher has never been heard, are open to Christian workers. Thousands of scholars have heard something of our doctrines. China is a land of scholars, and the literary classes rule in the larger part of the empire. Hundreds of these men have been converted, are now giving their influence to establishing the faith that they once ignorantly despised. The fact that hundreds have been converted proves that the proudest classes in the empire are not only easily accessible, but susceptible of conversion in common with other classes. Idolatrous practices and superstitious customs were abandoned, and a new life was the fruit of the radical change.

Again, the direct fruits of Christianity are by no means the measure of the power expended. Hospitals, dispensaries, schools, and colleges are having their influence in mitigating prejudice, and in gaining willing hearers. Presses are crowded in furnishing Bibles and tracts, which find sale in many parts of the interior, as well as in the maritime provinces of China.

The overthrow of idolatry, and the founding of Christianity in every dark land, is the sublimest cause ever committed to any generation of Christians. Heathenism is the abode of darkness, oppression, and cruelty, and no one knows heathenism who denies this.

The great fact that the hearing of the gospel is essential to belief in the gospel fixes our responsibility; in the mystery of the fact we may not lose our responsibility because of the fact.

Pessimism has no place in the life of a lover of missions. "Discouragement" is a word never found in his vocabulary. He may become slightly despondent, sometimes disappointed, discouraged never. Christianity is not only invincible; it is absolutely irresistible. Some of the proudest classes in China and India, the strongholds of idolatry, have been reached with the Gospel; and millions more are groping for the light. The greater part of the world's wealth is in the possession of Christian nations.

What is needed to hasten universal submission to the ever-widening kingdom is unanimity of effort on the part of all Christians, fostered by immovable convictions as to the helpless, hopeless servitude of scores of millions whose only hope is an idol of wood or stone. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Intense conviction means intense activity. When every Christian becomes a light-bearer, not only will the darkness rapidly pass away, the glorious period will be speedily ushered in when "the wilderness and the solitary shall be glad."