

PORTIONS OF AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY THE REV. J. M'GOWAN, BEFORE THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY AT ITS EIGHTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY.

I consider it to-day to be a great privilege to be amidst this great assembly to listen to the splendid story of this British and Foreign Bible Society. I have a very great love for the Bible, and I think every Englishman ought to have the same. If there is any subject upon which an Englishman ought to be enthusiastic, it is the Bible. Our growth in liberty, the heroic lives of men whose deaths have shed a lustre upon the dull pages of history, the growth of righteousness and truth in our land, which is, I believe, increasing day by day, all spring from the Bible. There is no one that feels this more truly and thoroughly than the missionary.

Now, I want to show you what our Bible is doing in China. Sometimes you hear people say—If you want to advance a people, give them commerce. I earnestly say, No; commerce will not raise a nation. I have seen the steamers coming to Amoy, the Manchester cotton landed on the wharves, and the boxes of opium piled on the piers. I have seen men standing around them and opening those boxes of opium. I follow them into the narrow streets round about where the commerce is best, and where the opium boxes have gone, but I don't find the men elevated there. I do not find that even scientific knowledge will advance a nation. In one region which I often passed through many years ago, a strange sight has latterly been visible. I see the telegraph wires there now. Men look at them in wonder and they say: "This comes from your country. This is from England." But I do not find morality has increased along the course of those wires. I do not find that the men are better men, I do not find husbands better husbands, I do not find wives better wives because they live in the region of these telegraph wires. No; after this quarter of a century's work among the Chinese, I say that there is no power that will teach and elevate that great nation except the truth and the spirit of the Bible.

Let me give an illustration of this. Some eighteen years ago, with a very fine Christian man as my companion, I went into the interior of China, some forty or fifty miles from Amoy. There is there a large market town containing some 10,000 inhabitants. This town was known in all the region round as one of the very worst in that region. All around the scenery was magnificent. The town was situated at the base of the mountains which stretched back one upon another until the last seemed to be touching the clouds. A beautiful river flowed through the plain. But it was a bad town. I went through the narrow streets, and I found as I had been told—that every house was either an opium house or a gambling den. When the crowds gathered around me I saw there the gamblers and the opium-smokers—the gamblers with hungry eyes and with hands twitching as though they still held the cards or were just about to throw the dice; the opium-smokers with faces opium-dyed—men who seemed lost to all sense of right and wrong.

I remember the first time I landed. The crowds were down on the shore. They had never seen an Englishman. Being market day, there were 10,000 more people in the town, making 20,000 altogether. They gathered round me. They wanted to see a European and what he looked like. Strange stories had come up the river that there were certain men going about preaching strange doctrines. Now here was the man in their midst, and he could talk their own language, too. When we got into our church the place was immediately crowded. I could see the heads of the people at the open door. There was no room to sit down. Amongst my audience there was one man who took my attention—a scholarly and thoughtful-looking man about fifty or sixty years old. I saw him standing there listening to what I was saying.