

The Open Church

JESMOND DENE

"BUSINESS had unexpectedly taken me to a new place, a fair-sized town, with some considerable factories and a good background of agricultural country—a good business future, apparently. It was my first visit, and the moment I stepped off the train I was conscious of something unusual, a welcoming air, a sense of goodwill, it seemed.

"I stayed just opposite the church, gray stone, with a really good spire, standing back from the road a little, with some fine trees around it, the rectory to one side, and a large building—the schoolhouse—slightly to the rear on the other. I woke early to the gloom of a dark autumn morning, and, noticing a light in the church, I dressed hastily and went across to see what was going on, for I always like to make general observations as I go about.

"It was an early Communion service, and, though the congregation was not large, it seemed a marvellous one for the place and for a weekday. There were some special prayers for individual needs, and one that this day of prayer might be faithfully observed, and might bring a blessing."

"Throughout the day people were going and coming, singly, or in twos or threes, and I learned afterwards that they were keeping a general day of intercession, and that prayer was being offered all day long. I met two men coming out together, evidently on their way to business; a man driving a cart stopped and disappeared into the church for a few minutes and then went on his way; others, who seemed to be factory workers, came and went; later in the day, some little youngsters, carrying schoolbags, slipped inside; and about midday I noticed various men and women who had snatched a few minutes from the lunch hour.

"I was moved to go in more than once myself, for there was something that appealed to me, and seemed to draw me in a way I couldn't resist. The first time there was only one person there—a woman kneeling before the sanctuary—yet the whole atmosphere was one of fellowship. You know the feeling some rooms give you, even when they're empty—that they are the abode of love and rest, the meeting-place of a real family? Well, this church had that air—the air of a well-loved abode, the shrine of some dear presence, the meeting-place of friends and lovers. You were conscious of a Presence, and you knew it was there in response to those who came, obedient to the summons, *Seek ye My face*.

"Later in the day there was a service. The Rector made a little address, pointing out how love alone could save the world: the love of the Father in sending His well-beloved Son; the love of the Incarnate Son Himself; the love of the Spirit in His patient strivings with our self-will. Then he spoke of the love of the soldiers in the war, and how love was just as much needed in our streets and counting-houses and homes today, and everywhere, among white or black or yellow men, among ignorant or learned—everywhere where there are souls to be saved. You could only set men free by loving them, he said. He reminded them how they had prayed during the war, and that the need for prayer was no less urgent now that the battle-front had changed; that men needed to draw nigh to God now as ever, and that was the only way to find peace. Then he prayed: for peace and unity and love; for a constant and holy remembrance of the dead; for continual thankfulness for God's compassions, which fail not, but are new every morning; for missions and social work; and then for individual needs, for sick and sorrowing, for children, and a great many others.

"I had a chance later to learn something about the place. 'Yes; a wonderful man,' they said. 'Not specially brilliant or very gifted in the ordinary sense, but a wonderful saint, a wonderful lover of souls. He has been here a good many years, of course, and he has won a most

extraordinary position. Everyone looks to him, not so much as a leader, but more as a kind father or elder brother. He is welcome in the schools and factories, and once a week (Wednesday) he gathers the children after school hours and teaches them in a way of his own. All sorts of children come. 'I won't say I hold with everything of Mr. Interpreter's,' some parents say, 'but what I say is, how can my child get anything but good from being taught by anyone like him.' . . . He has very happy relations with the various clergy, the Roman Catholic Priest and the different ministers. There is no question of inter-communion or interchange of pulpits, but they interchange ideas, and I know they meet for prayer from time to time, most of them.

"There is a group of visitors in connection with the W.A. to look up new people and sick people and others, and keep him in touch, and another group for boys and men. The parish house is very large, as you noticed—too large just for our congregation. It is a social centre for the community, and was designed for that. There is a good basement, where the young people dance or play games, and good accommodation for clubs and other gatherings for men and for women, boys and girls, and a 'parents' club, besides the regular church gatherings. Membership in the clubs is open to anyone who wishes to join and will keep the regulations, which are simple. The membership is not confined to the Church at all. The Rector's idea is that the Church should help in work like this, not with the purpose of making converts—from that point of view he seems inclined to think it may be rather a failure—but because it's right, and he says this work is a contribution from the Church to the social welfare of the community.

"There are various committees to look after all this, and a certain number of responsible hosts and hostesses for the social evenings, which make it all much more home-like, besides being a very necessary safeguard.

"A thing that has pleased us all very much was the recent gift of a house for an old people's home—a great wish of the Rector's heart—and he has some particular ideal about its being more a number of little, individual homes under one roof and management than a regular institution, where the old people can enjoy some little, individual touches. There are several people working out the details for this, and we hope soon to open the Wicket Gate; that's to be its name. You know we call the rectory the Interpreter's House, and the parish house, the House Beautiful.

"A great organizer? No; that's not it. He could never do it if he were that. He is a great idealist, who believes in prayer, and in people, too, and who can inspire people to carry ideas into practice. He thinks the Church is meant to be the soul of the community, and he gets people working it out. Do you know the secret of this place? It's that open church, always reminding us of God's presence in the midst of us; and the goodwill you speak of is, I believe, part of God's answer to the prayers that are all the time going up to Him. A man of prayer is the Interpreter. That's all the secret."

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

(Continued from page 743.)

and object of life, which the Christian year is designed to impress, that when He shall come again in His glorious majesty, "We may rise to the life immortal through Him who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever."

"Come to us, Lord, we watch for Thee;
We shall never feel surmise
If sudden we lift our eyes and see
The dayspring o'er us rise."

We do not know what ripples of healing are set in motion when we simply smile on one another. Christianity wants nothing so much in the world as sunny people.—Henry Drummond.

In Memoriam: Mrs. J. Cooper Robinson

WITH the passing of Mrs. Robinson, the wife of the Rev. J. Cooper Robinson, of Japan, the first link in the chain of missionary workers of the Church of England from Canada has been broken. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson blazed a trail which has been kept open for thirty-one years.

Bessie Poynton Robinson was born in Nottingham, England, September 23rd, 1858, and received her education there. She lived abroad for two years, making a special study of French in Paris. Her mother had died when she was only thirteen. In 1881 she came, with her elder sister, to Toronto and engaged in educational work. Many of her old pupils have kept in close touch with her until her death. She took an active part in various kinds of Christian work, and was a valued teacher in the Church of the Redeemer Sunday School, which has her name on its roll of honoured missionaries.

Miss Poynton had always cherished the hope of carrying the Gospel to some foreign land, and her friendship with Mr. Cooper Robinson, a young theological student at Wycliffe College, seemed to be intimately associated with missionary work, for he, too, had his dreams, and India was the goal to which he felt called. While visiting in the United States Miss Poynton became intensely interested in another foreign field, the land of the Rising Sun, and wrote to her friend of this new desire which had been aroused. By a strange coincidence, he, too, had heard an appeal from Bishop Bickersteth, of Japan, and wrote at once to her. Their letters crossed, and, as soon as circumstances allowed, they made preparations for their departure to their new field of work. After finishing his theological course Mr. Robinson took some medical training, which proved a great blessing in his early work in Japan.

On May 26th, 1888, they were married at the Church of the Redeemer, Toronto, by the late Canon Septimus Jones. Her old friend, Mrs. Schutt, at whose home the reception was held, is still living at the age of ninety-two years. The Rev. T. R. O'Meara, now Principal of Wycliffe College, was groomsmen. The official Mission Society of the Church did not see its way clear to undertake the responsibility of placing a missionary in any foreign field, and an association of graduates from Wycliffe College was formed which asked Mr. Robinson to go as its representative.

By September of that year Mr. and Mrs. Robinson reached Tokio. A mission was opened and St. James Church begun. In order to enter the country both Mr. and Mrs. Robinson had to get passports for teaching, and a night school was opened. The young wife played the organ for all the services, and many listeners were brought in—curious, but not always sympathetic. She kept a souvenir of those early days in the shape of a tile which had been thrown at them by an unfriendly hand. While keeping up their work they were steadily gaining a knowledge of the language. There was no language school, nor, indeed, were there many books. Mrs. Robinson, to whom had been born two little daughters, was not allowed by her physician to study, yet she acquired the language quite readily, and was often complimented by the natives for her "excellent Japanese."

Mrs. Robinson's home duties and delicate health kept her from doing as much visiting and teaching as at first, but she always accompanied her husband up to Ichi nomiya (first shrine), a few miles away, and played the organ for the service, which was practically open-air, as the building was open at the front, and listeners were grouped around outside. She received one day a touching note from the Catechist, who was afterwards priested, in which he "thanked her for coming and being an exposed thing to the savagans." A foreign lady was a very unusual sight.

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