

The Onward March of China.

BY THE REV. GRIFFITH JOHN, OF HANCHOW.

Only forty years ago it was a crime for a foreigner to learn the Chinese language, a crime to teach it to a foreigner, a crime to print anything in it for foreigners. No public preaching was tolerated in those days.

To address one or two individuals, with fear and trembling, in an inner apartment, with the doors securely locked, was all that Dr. Morrison, our first Protestant Missionary in China, could do.

He did a great work in translating the Scriptures; but he found it quite impossible to go forth, and proclaim the message of salvation.

To him China was a sealed country.

At the end of a laborious career of twenty-six years, this faithful servant of Christ could not boast of ten converts.

It was the treaty of 1842 that began to open China to the merchant and missionary.

When I arrived in China, more than twenty-five years ago, there were just five spots in the whole of that vast empire where a foreigner might pitch his tent. The interior was hermetically closed against him, the length of his tether being only twenty-four hours from the treaty port.

How different the present state of things! The whole empire is open to us, and the Missionary has the right to go and deliver his message in every province, city, town, and hamlet in the land.

All the provinces have been visited by Missionaries, and most of them repeatedly.

I have myself travelled over large portions of nine of the provinces. Thirteen out of the eighteen have actually been occupied by Missionaries and their families.

The Gospel has been proclaimed in nearly all the principal cities and towns.

The Bible has been distributed everywhere, and Christian literature scattered over the face of the land.

Churches have been formed at the ports and in many an inland town, while isolated Christians may be found here, there, and everywhere.

Out of sixty or seventy walled cities in Hupeh, the province in which I have labored for the last twenty years, there are only seven that have not been visited by the colporteur or Missionary. In order to appreciate this fact you must bear in

mind that the area of Hupeh is larger than that of England and Wales put together!

There is only one province at present whose capital is closed against us, and that is the anti-foreign province of Hunan.

A short time since the same might have been said of Kiang-si. Missionaries had called at the suburbs of its capital, but every attempt to enter it openly had been successfully resisted. In January of last year, Mr. Archibald, of the Scotch Bible Society, and myself appeared before its gates, and were turned back. In the afternoon of the same day we had a long interview with two of the magistrates. They were not at all inclined to admit us into their famous city, but we managed to persuade them, and on the following day we entered with their full permission. We walked about in all directions, saw all that was to be seen, preached freely in the temples and streets, and sold as many books as we could spare.

That was the first time the Gospel was preached in the noble city of Nan-chang.

Whilst in Kiang-si we visited King-teh-chen, a place of far wider fame than Nan-chang. This immense mart has obtained world-wide fame for its porcelain manufactories. Here no Missionary work had ever been attempted, and I had grave doubts as to whether a foreigner would be admitted within the precincts of a place so jealously guarded. Our success however was complete.

We landed without opposition, penetrated its narrow streets, visited its furnaces, and inspected every department of its porcelain manufactories.

We also preached to immense crowds, and sold thousands of books and tracts.

I shall never forget our congregation in the centre of the town. We had found our way to an immense square in front of the Imperial pottery.

For a while the whole town seemed to be pouring into this square; and at one time there must have been from three to four thousand people present. Here we stood for hours; I, preaching with all my might, and both of us selling books as fast as we could hand them to the eager purchasers.

Having never seen a foreign face before, the curiosity was intense, and the excitement considerable, but we had no difficulty in keeping the crowd within bounds. Our work finished we departed in peace, feeling deeply grateful to God for what He had enabled us to accomplish. . . . The ease with which the work of itineration can be carried on in China is simply wonderful.