

Our Contributors.

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The Martyr Church of Formosa.

BY REV. THURLOW FRASER, B.D.

To most Canadian Presbyterians the thought of mission work in Formosa is inseparably connected with the name of the late Dr. MacKay, and "MacKay of Formosa" is as much a household word in mission circles in Canada as is "MacKay of Uganda" in Britain. But it is not generally known that almost two hundred and fifty years before the young Canadian missionary landed at Tamsui, apostles of the same Reformed faith as he proclaimed began work in Formosa, and that two and a half centuries ago there was a Christian Church among the Malay aborigines of this island which counted its members by thousands. The story of that early attempt at the evangelization of the Beautiful Island is one of the most tragic in the history of Christian missions. It ought to be especially interesting to those who have followed the efforts of the English and Canadian missionaries who have laboured in Formosa during the last forty years, for their Pe-po-hoan and Sek-hoan converts are descendants of those to whom the gospel was preached by the Dutch missionaries; probably some of them are descended from the native Christians of that day.

In their competition with the Spanish and Portuguese for the lucrative China trade, the Dutch, in the year 1624, established themselves in the southern part of the then almost unknown island of Formosa. Their first and principal trading post was known as Fort Zeelandia, on the site of which now stands the large Chinese city of Tainan. At that time, however, there were very few Chinese in the island, the population being almost entirely composed of the Malay aborigines.

The Formosan trade seems to have been a paying one to the Dutch East India Company. But they were not contented with merely trading with the heathen. The spirit of the Reformation still lived in Holland, and these early Dutch traders and administrators took religion quite as seriously as did their contemporaries, the English Puritans. After all that has been said, and much that has been proved against the mercenary spirit of the Dutch settlers and traders in South Africa, and also in Japan and other parts of the East, it is a relief to find that they were not totally depraved. In the early days of the Dutch East India Company, so far were its directors from opposing any work done for the benefit of the heathen populations of their possessions in the East, that the missionaries were appointed and their salaries paid by the Company. And there are extant letters from the Governor General and Council at Batavia to Church Consistories in which some of the missionaries, both ministers and teachers, are severely rebuked for remissness in performance of their duty to learn the language of the natives, and to instruct them in the gospel. In this case we sympathise with the missionaries, struggling with the perplexities of several unwritten dialects, and

venture to think that the high officials, who reproved them, had never tried it themselves.

In this zeal for religion, as well as for trade, the Company, as soon as the post at Fort Zeelandia was established, sent out two Scripture Readers or Catechists. Three years later, in 1627, the first ordained minister, the Rev. George Candidius, arrived in Formosa, and immediately began work among the natives, while at the same time attending to the duties of chaplain to the Dutch residents. With a short interval of absence he remained for ten years, and at the present time the only large lake on the island is known by his name. In 1629 he was joined by the Rev. Robert Junius, a native of Rotterdam, but of Scotch parentage, a man of ability, education and evangelical zeal. For fourteen years he laboured zealously, preaching, teaching and writing. The East India Company earnestly seconded his efforts, sending out at different times, eight ordained clergymen and many school teachers to assist him. With the help of the native language was reduced to writing, some of the people were taught to read and were instructed in the catechisms which Junius prepared in their dialects. As a result of his own and his companions' labours, Junius saw no less than 5900 adult natives baptized before he left the island. But the trying climate, still the foe of men of northern birth, forced him to leave. His wife had died in Formosa, and his own health was so shattered that in 1643 he was compelled to return to Holland. He died there thirteen years later.

The Mission felt his loss severely, but found able successors to him. Of these, the two most noteworthy were Daniel Cravius and Anthony Hambroek. Cravius was pastor of the church in Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indian possessions. His flock were most devoted to him, and the officials of the Company held him in high esteem. But the difficulty of getting a competent successor to Junius moved him to offer himself for the Formosan work. The people of Batavia (including the Governor General) put forth every effort to retain him; but when he persisted in his resolution, they gave him all the assistance in their power, and he reached Formosa in the spring of 1647. He remained only four years; but his exceptional abilities, especially in acquiring languages, enabled him to render services to the Mission quite out of proportion to the length of time he was in the island. He was afterwards again pastor in Batavia, and both there and subsequently in Holland he continued his work for Formosa. So late as the New Year of 1662 he published a most carefully prepared "Formulary of Christianity," in parallel columns of Dutch and Formosan. He also translated the Gospel of St. Matthew. But both works seem to have been too late to be of service to the Formosan Church, for ere they could reach the island, the Dutch Mission there had come to its tragic close.

Hambroek arrived in Formosa a year later than Cravius, and after the latter

returned to Batavia seems to have been the acknowledged leader of the Mission. The Formosan Church was prosperous and promising, with a much larger staff of foreign missionaries than at present possessed by the two Missions in the island. Of the twenty-nine clergymen sent out at different times many were still in active service, while there was a considerably larger number of unordained teachers and other assistants. Their confidence in Hambroek's character and ability is shown by their recommending that the Company should appoint him superintendent of all the churches and schools in the whole southern part of the island. It was also recommended that a College for the training of a native ministry should be established, and that Hambroek should be its first principal. These resolutions were drawn up at a meeting of the Church Consistory held in the year 1657.

But it was not to be. While the Dutch missionaries were peacefully labouring among the Malay inhabitants of Formosa, a storm-cloud had been gathering on the neighbouring coast of China. In 1644 the native Ming dynasty of China was overthrown by the ancestors of the present Manchu-Tartar rulers of the Celestial Empire. Submissive as the Chinese usually are, there were, nevertheless, many who refused to live peacefully under the invaders, but kept up a ceaseless though eventually unsuccessful war against them. The most successful of these patriotic rebels was the chief who is known to Western historians as Koxinga. He could number his land forces by tens of thousands, and his powerful fleet controlled the China seas, and ravaged the coasts of the provinces which had submitted to the Tartars. But all his skill and bravery were finally unavailing against the Tartar hosts; so embarking a large army he crossed the channel to found a kingdom for himself in Formosa.

The Dutch were taken by surprise, and most of those in outlying districts were captured before they could reach any fortified place of refuge. The handful of soldiers and civilians who composed the garrison of Fort Zeelandia, made a desperate resistance holding out for nine months against the overwhelming force with which Koxinga besieged them. The Chinese leader tried to persuade them to surrender, a temptation by fair promises to themselves, and by barbarous cruelty to the prisoners he had already taken. He made these hostages for their friends and fellow countrymen in the fort. When the commandant of the fortress persisted in his refusal to surrender, Koxinga had many of his Dutch prisoners beheaded, and a number he caused to be crucified. Nailed by the hands and the calves of their legs to upright posts those unfortunate victims of heathen cruelty bore the agony of their wounds and of a burning Formosan sun till on the fourth day of their sufferings death brought them deliverance. But neither promises nor threats could induce the garrison of Fort Zeelandia to surrender. Even when the fleet sent to their relief had to sail away without effecting anything they still held out, and only yielded their fortress when compelled to do so by famine, and on Koxinga's granting them leave to sail away in their only remaining ship.