

FEAST OF THE MOON

A MISSIONARY'S INTERESTING EXPERIENCES

By Rev. William J. Cahill

"What did you think of the Feast of the Adoration of the Moon last night?" Thus questioned several of my Chinese students at Catechism Class when I had finished the regular lesson and asked: "Any questions?"

On the previous evening on the main street of Kaifeng in front of many residences I had noticed tables which were laden with fruit, vegetables and pastry together with lighted candles and burning incense. Beside the tables were the housewives and children in a prostrate position. The Chinese were adoring the moon and offering the gifts which were on the table to the moon.

My students had judged that I would treat this annual celebration as a big joke—as something to be laughed at or even ridiculed. They did not think I would look upon the celebration as a serious act of worship. Thus all my students in the Mission School where I taught English were expectant, gazing at me amusedly, as if I were going to give a flippant answer.

EXPECTED HE WOULD POKE FUN

"Perhaps you expect me to poke fun at the Chinese celebration last night," I began with a smile. I smiled because I wanted as Saint Ignatius of old "to go in their door and then lead them to come out my door."

"The celebration last night made a deep impression upon me. I do not believe, you know, in adoring the moon. Yet I respect those who do. You know I don't adore the moon but God Who made the moon." The answer did not satisfy. Chinese boys as well as American boys want illustrations. So I called Mr. Ling, one of my brightest boys, to the front of the class.

"Suppose you had a donkey, Mr. Ling, and I wished to ride to the North Gate, would you loan me your donkey?"

"Certainly, Father, and I would be glad to run along and lead the donkey."

"After you had run alongside of your donkey for three miles, and I would dismount, wouldn't you think that I would be ungrateful if I would pat your donkey on the neck, and repeatedly say: 'Thank you, little donkey,' and yet never say a word of thanks to you who owned the donkey?" Thus I questioned.

"But Father, you wouldn't be so foolish as to pat a dumb donkey, and say: 'Thank you, little donkey,'" interjected one youngster.

"Or to forget Mr. Ling who owns the donkey," interrupted another. "And yet if you say that I would be foolish to pat a dumb donkey, and ungrateful to forget Mr. Ling, the owner of the donkey, shall we not pity the people who kowtow—who pat the moon on its face as it were—and forget the good God Who made the moon?" They were quick to see the point.

To profit by the methods of other missionaries whose work is progressing in China, I visited the establishment of the Society of the Divine Word, at Yenchowfu, in the province of South Shantung. There kneeling alongside of Father King, who with Father Clark, was the first American to leave from the house of studies at Techny, Illinois, with Father Hagspiel, better known to juvenile readers as Father Pruno, with the Right Reverend W. Gier, Superior General of the Society, and other priests I listened to some 50 Chinese intone the sublime prayer of the morning "Tsai T'ien neu tang foutee" (Our Father Who art in Heaven). To hear this ancient Our Father, that nineteen centuries of faith have repeated, and to hear it in this strange language so far from the shores of America made me weep with joy, and I appreciated in a new manner the great miracle of the Catholicity of the Church. Father King said that their vicariate, presided over by Bishop Hennighaus, had almost 100,000 Christians with almost 50,000 Chinese who were studying to become Christians.

WHAT CHRISTIANITY MEANS TO CHINESE

Later, around the dinner table, at which were seated priests from Germany, Belgium, France, Holland, China, and our own United States I asked this question: "What does Christianity mean to the Chinese today?"

"Do we teach school?" questioned the venerable Chinese priest. "Besides a large school for boys and seminarians, maintained by the Fathers and Brothers, there is a school across the road, directed by the Sisters of the Holy Ghost, with about 100 girls ranging in ages from six to twenty years."

"Why all this teaching?" continued the priest. "To prove that Western civilization had a kind of education which fits more people better for the hardships of life than the Oriental education. Thus the Chinese think."

In the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Ghost I noted about 40 Chinese girls and young women engaged in making lace, embroidery, tapestry, and vestments for the church; about 40 others with awl and needles were stitching shoes for the community or cutting out winter clothes for the seminarians; several blind women were winding spools of thread. In the laundry 22 girls were scrubbing the clothes while outside several blind girls were pumping the water. In another room several girls, talented with the brush, were painting pictures.

"And why so much attention to manual training?" I asked from one of the Fathers who accompanied me.

"You remember your conversation with the Chinese priest," replied the Father. "These missionary Sisters are upholding the civilization which is a product of Christianity. And when our Western civilization, has thus been vindicated thoroughly, I believe there will be a much wider acceptance of the doctrines taught by Christ."

FINALLY WHEN THE SISTERS OPENED THE DOOR OF A DORMITORY AND SAID: 'SHIN FO, LAI' (THE PRIEST COMES), I WAS AMAZED TO SEE TWENTY AGED WOMEN FALL TO THEIR KNEES WITH THEIR HANDS TOUCHING THE BARE BRICK FLOOR.

"They want your blessing, Father," said one of the Sisters. There in that enclosure my heart was touched with the striking example of Chinese girls engaged in caring for these old, infirm friends of Jesus. The old women were all busy, some sewing, some weaving, some mending, some winding thread, or making rosary beads.

"You know, Father, we could have placed these dear old souls in another part of the enclosure but this location close to the children is a source of mutual edification. The old women see that we love and cherish the children, especially the girl children, whom pagan Chinese customs have taught them to despise. Then too the little children, are imbued with the spirit of Christ in caring for their homeless and penniless old women."

When I arrived in Stanghai I went direct to the orphan asylum of the Little Helpers of the Holy Souls. I wanted to know something more about the Chinese babies.

"Won't you tell me, Mother, why such a sign on which is inscribed: 'Don't Throw Your Girl Babies In Here. Dead Babies are Bad For the Water' is found on the edge of a lake in the centre of a Chinese city?" I questioned Mother Casilda, who as Miss Pauline Brown, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William P. Brown, left her parents' home in Baltimore about fifteen years ago to volunteer for work among the Chinese babies.

"A Chinese, who has not a son, is considered the most unfortunate of men," responded Mother Casilda whose Sisters baptize about 400 foundlings every year in their three orphan asylums in Shanghai. "The father is very unhappy unless he can leave after him an heir to offer sacrifice on his tomb. As Chinese girls are not permitted to take any part in family affairs, the first-born must be a boy, otherwise the child is not suffered to live."

"And if the first-born should happen to be a girl, what then?" I questioned as we reverently entered the white-walled ward where over twenty guardian angels were hovering around waiting to carry to heaven the souls of the infants whom Mother Casilda termed "hopeless"—hopeless as far as living in this world is concerned.

THE CHILD OF BAD OMEN

"It would be regarded as a bad omen for the family if the first-born is a girl. Thus to save the whole household from certain misfortune, the girl child is killed, contained the Mother as she pulled up the sheet over the emaciated form of an infant which died just before we entered the ward."

"And how do they kill their babies?" I asked. "Many of the unfortunate babies are deprived of life in the mother's room, being either strangled or suffocated by the deluded parents. Others are abandoned on the city dumps. Some pious Chinese men and women go to these dumps before day-break, and listen for the wail of the infants," responded the former Baltimorean, whose sister is Mrs. Walter Boggs, and whose brother was the late Paul Brown who died as a Jesuit scholastic.

"And why do they go before day-break?" I asked. "To get there before the dogs," Mother Casilda said. "Other women more humane leave their offspring at our door, or send the child to us." In this asylum, Mother Casilda pointed out, the great need is for American medical missionaries. In an adjoining manual training school, conducted by the Jesuits a lay

brother pointed out several tiers of small boxes. "We supply almost 300 of these little boxes every year for the dead infants across the road." And a medical missionary, with a knowledge of the ailments which affect these foundlings could save about 100 babies every year, said the Mother.

ROMAN CATHOLICS NOT CHRISTIANS

From my mission of Kaifeng in the province of Honan to Hsuehchowfu I traveled over the Belgian Long Hai Railroad through a district infested by the bandits. On the rear of the train there was a "Pullman" car with no credit to a freight caboose in America. However in order to miss none of the excitement I took a seat in a third class day coach in which over 100 Chinese were crowded. Naturally in travelling through a country such as China, a foreigner is often misunderstood. But it was the first time in my life that I was ever exhorted to become a Christian. This is how it happened.

En route a young Chinese civil engineer entered and sat down by my side. He noticed me reading my Breviary, and asked, in broken English: "Are you an Anglican priest?"

"No, sir, I am a Roman Catholic priest."

"A Roman Catholic priest!" repeated the Chinaman with much astonishment. "Then I hope you will turn to be a Christian. You see Roman Catholics are not Christians."

"If Roman Catholics are not Christians, who are?" I apologetically asked. "The Christians are Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and some others whose names I forget. They worship God. You Roman Catholics don't worship God. You worship Mary."

My "enlightened" teacher left the train before I could give an antidote to the teaching of some Protestant missionary in China, but I have his address, as well as the address of his teacher.

LOOKING BACKWARD

After the train pulled out of the station, and the soldiers took up their stand at each end of the car, and the conductor, guarded by five soldiers each armed with a rifle, a revolver, and dagger, came along collecting the tickets I settled back, or rather settled up on my wooden bench (for there was no back) and I travelled in imagination to the seaport of Nagasaki, Japan. On the hills surrounding Nagasaki harbor over 25,000 Catholic Japanese have been put to death because they wouldn't deny the founder of Christianity.

And yet I stood there in imagination on the dock in Nagasaki with so many evidences of Japanese Catholicism looking down upon me, my view of another Catholic Church was blocked by a huge sign on which was painted in huge, black letters: "Christian Institutions Represented in Nagasaki, Japan." And then I read the following list: "Methodist, Episcopal, Reformed Church in America, Southern Baptist Mission, Congregational, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Seamen's Home, Y. M. C. A."—but not one word about those Catholic institutions looking down upon that sign or about the Catholic Church which the sign hid from my view.

After recalling that Protestants had the audacity to paint that sign in full view of several Catholic institutions in such an old Catholic city as Nagasaki, I couldn't help sympathizing with the Chinamen who wanted to convert me to Christianity.

WORLD'S OLDEST VOLUME

CAPUCHIN TRANSLATES CHALDEAN CYLINDERS

What is said to be the most ancient book in existence in the world figures in a recent work by Father Hillaire de Barenton of the Capuchin Order, which has attracted extensive interest among specialists, and has been received with much attention in various parts of the world. Father de Barenton has just completed and published his translation of two Chaldean cylinders which are known as the Gouden cylinders, and which belong to the museum of the Louvre. Much light is thrown by these researches upon some of the striking ways of people of the ancient days involved, especially with regard to their manner of writing. These cylinders may be described as blocks of a hard substance, which were employed by the Chaldeans and Assyrians of old as seals. They were covered with inscriptions which are of great interest to the present day student of these subjects. The translation under discussion is followed by numerous notes and commentaries, which are themselves deserving of close study.

BEFORE BIRTH OF ABRAHAM

Gouden was a Priest-King who reigned in Chaldea from about the year 2100 to 2080 B. C., a little before the birth of Abraham. On the clay of the cylinder is found inscribed a text, and it is this that is described as the most ancient book now in existence in the world. In this ancient text there is told the story of the construction and organization of a temple, and the

ancient writer went into many details in his treatment of his subject. A striking feature of the deductions to be drawn from a reading of this text is the evidence it gives that many Chaldean customs were carried into the Western World and thus contributed to the civilization of the present day.

Many attempts at translation of this text were made before the present one, but they were all incomplete on many points. One of the highly important points ably elucidated by Father de Barenton is his proof, by means of recently discovered synchronisms that various ancient Chaldean dynasties which had hitherto been believed to have been successive in time, were, in reality, contemporaneous. Aside from his present work, Father de Barenton is well known for his scholarly works on the Etruscan tongue, which have been crowned by the Academy of Inscriptions.—The Pilot.

TO REMEMBER

Remember day by day, that He who gives thee the morning, does not promise thee the evening, nor yet the morrow. Spend, therefore, every moment of every hour according to God's Will as if it were thy last, and so much the more, for each moment thou wilt have to give strict account.—Father Laurence Scuppoli.

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