

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Where East meets West.

TO study a tree, an animal organism, a mine, it is most useful to have one or two sections, perhaps along and across. Any one interested in the state of Christianity in China will be much indebted to Messrs. Seeley Service & Co. for two admirable books.* The one shows progress in the north-east for fifty years, which is nearly all the period of effective work. The other shows the position now in several parts of the great empire. The former is written by an expert colleague; the latter by an English visitor. So between them a very good idea can be obtained of the present position and the needs. The books are alike in one defect; neither has a map. A serious student would gladly go without one or two pictures, especially one that has been published twelve years ago, in order to follow clearly the whereabouts of the work.

Mrs. Butler was asked by her United Methodist Church to go with her husband and the secretary round the chief stations in China and Africa. It would really seem time to consider whether several members of every missionary committee should be required to qualify for their posts by personal acquaintance. Our own mission work has in the past suffered tragically from the sheer ignorance of the English committee, their failure to appreciate conditions abroad, and their refusal to endorse the plans of those on the field. One of our great banks which has branches in Egypt and India, besides the River Plate and Brazil, takes special pains to have direct knowledge of conditions in these places.

It is a great advantage that one of this Methodist deputation was a woman, and that she is the writer of the report. If a male reader would occasionally like a little more information on some points, he gets unexpected glimpses into domestic scenes; and everything is written in a homely, colloquial fashion. Social conditions come out here rather than theological, and the reader will appreciate that Christian workers abroad have to deal with men, women and children essentially the same as at home, however striking the differences appear at first.

In three respects Mrs. Butler's book presents a state of affairs that is independent of China. For the United Methodists

* *Timothy Richard of China*, by Professor W. E. Soothill; with thirteen illustrations; 12s. 6d. net. *Missions as I Saw Them*, by Mrs. Thomas Butler; with twenty-four illustrations, 6s. net.

have a mission in East Africa, the district now so well known as Kenya. There the people are in a stage of civilization quite unlike the East; the Europeans have had to teach them much of agriculture, and have had to grapple with the question of slavery. It is good to have missions in different continents, and then every aspirant after foreign service can be suited. Our Australian Baptists at present can go under denominational auspices to Bengal only; and if for any reason that does not attract them, they have to work in China or Africa with comrades of other communions. Again, in Kenya there is an inflow of people from India, which is raising difficult political problems; so also as to Christian efforts, for methods suited to the negro are not so suitable to the immigrant. And in South America there are many signs that the mixture of non-white races can produce a blend both non-Christian and horribly savage. The most serious problem noted by Mrs. Butler was raised at the cessation of work by the Germans. This may have been inevitable during the war; but their converts sadly miss guidance. It speaks well for all concerned that when the deputation had to announce that want of funds prevented the Methodists assuming permanent responsibility, the Christians at once offered to bear all their expenses, if only one or two Europeans would guide them.

While such missions have plenty of romance, it is China that raises questions of the first importance. Here is a civilization older than ours, and now plastic. Here are religions older than ours, and people quite conscious that Confucius shirked every first-class question, so that for news as to God and sin and immortality they turn to Christ. Fortunate indeed it is that here East meets West, even if the extreme Westerners come further westwards from Vancouver and San Francisco to reach the extreme East.

While Christianity had come to China from Persia twelve centuries ago, and from Italy six centuries ago, yet the results had all but died out by the middle of last century. For practical purposes, Timothy Richard was in the first flight of modern missions when he arrived in 1870. He was guided by God's providence to Shantung, the province of Confucius, the intellectual leader of the empire: and it is noteworthy that the conditions of travel, food, climate, are less unlike ours in this province than in most. Our Baptist work developed thence.

Mrs. Butler belongs to a communion which has amalgamated several of the minor Methodist bodies, and thus in China she saw missions in widely different parts. To reach some of them from the coast is quite a serious problem; and when enhanced by the brigandage now rife, it is not surprising to find that the visitors were positively forbidden by the officials to risk

their lives in some quarters. All honour then to the steadfast workers who penetrate far and settle down.

But the student of the Chinese Church, having gained interesting local colour from the lady visitor's book, will turn to the life of Li T'i-mo-t'ai to find out how it is that within eighty years of Europeans being allowed to set foot on the mainland, a Chinese National Church has emerged, while the missionaries echo the words of John the Baptist and see that they must decrease as it increases.

Richard got his start by a famine, exactly as the American Baptists did with the Telugus. Practical philanthropy appeals now, as it did in Galilee. And Richard did not merely cope with the temporary difficulty; he urged on the Chinese that they must provide against future famines by improving roads or building railways. He was ever a far-sighted man. Like Edward Irving he saw ideals, accepted them, and sought to realize them. It was hard for him to be yoked with those who had little vision, had not imbibed the spirit of Carey; fortunately they threw off the yoke and left him free to go his own way. And fortunately the home committee had sense enough to let both parties work in the way most congenial.

Richard concentrated on two things, Education and Literature. In both respects he knew the nation would appreciate the best, and he only had to persuade it that the West was better than the East. He was statesman enough to see and approve how Ricci had obeyed literally the injunction to seek out those in each place who were worthy. While in India we have seldom aimed at the gentry, the nobles, the kings, yet in China Richard went both for those who were morally worthy like Cornelius, and for those who were influential and in office.

The Chinese have long had the rule that all posts in the civil and military services are open to all men, selection being made by competitive examination. The task here, therefore, was to see that modern subjects were prescribed. It was much the same problem as to induce Oxford and Cambridge to recognize that there were other branches of learning besides classics and mathematics. Richard killed several birds with one stone when as an expiation of the Shansi murders, he secured the foundation of the Shansi University. Of this he was made Chancellor in 1902, and the whole story is adequately set forth by Dr. Soothill. Sir John Jordan, who contributes a foreword to this biography, was one of the most successful of British ambassadors to China, and he reports that the province, once the most besotted with opium, is now educationally the most advanced, and is the best governed. All through Shansi, in schools, in government offices, in magistrates' residences, in police barracks, are graduates of this university. It has set

a model which was being deliberately imitated in every province till the war.

The Chinese are great readers. The labourer or the carter will while away a leisure half-hour with a penny dreadful; while there are books of ethics and philosophy for the most advanced. Richard decided that there must be adequate Christian literature, and he found supporters. This was his unique work, which deserves to be expanded without limit. He induced seven missionary boards to co-operate both in production and distribution: we may humbly rejoice that such men as T. M. Morris, Richard Glover, and others yet living, backed him and got the B.M.S. to lend him for this work.

The Christian Literature Society publishes artistic calendars, picture-books, tracts on hygiene, ethics, religion, magazines, books, both translated and original. Last year there were eighteen million pages printed. Books are in preparation, varying from *Lorna Doone* to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Though dead, Richard yet speaks: for an In Memoriam prize of £35 is offered for the best tale by a Chinese introducing Christianity; and about £2,700 has been subscribed as another Memorial Book Fund; while his library of seven thousand volumes is at the disposal of the Shanghai staff.

The importance of this work seems not to be appreciated by English Baptists. The Society indeed tells off Evan Morgan to the work, and supplies a secretary; but the financial support is astonishing. We spent £172,000 last year on our various fields, of which £52,545 went to China. But how much went to Christian literature? The total subscriptions and donations from all the denominations were: China, £1,650, Scotland, £420, England, £300. The committee asks for about ten thousand pounds within five years. Those who admire Timothy Richard, or see the importance of feeding the new Chinese Church with Christian literature, should send to Miss Bowser at 3, Cleveland Gardens, Ealing, W.13.

The Bristol Baptist Itinerant Society was founded in 1824 at Old King Street. In a century the city has increased seven-fold, and so well has the Society worked that Baptists have kept pace. There was also energy to spare for villages near, and the lay preachers of last century did fine work in building up causes. The story of the hundred years has been fully told by Sir John Swaish, K.B.E., D.L., J.P., in a shilling booklet, to be had from E. F. Simons, Bush Street, Totterdown.