

## CHAPTER XIV.

1847—1850.

### BREAKING GROUND.

“**F**ORTY years have elapsed,” said the Rev. James Hamilton, in his report to the Synod early in the next year, “since a young man, a native of Newcastle, and brought up in one of our Presbyterian Churches, effected his circuitous and almost clandestine passage as the first Protestant missionary to the Chinese empire. Arriving solitary on a shy and unwelcoming shore, with no Christian friend to cheer him, and no European arm to shelter him, that faithful servant of Jesus spent years of lonely and perilous toil in conquering a language with which scarce an Englishman had dared to grapple. But many a happy change, the harbinger of changes happier still, may thankfully be recognized in Mr. Burns’ entrance on his work. Proceeding boldly to his destination, an honoured passenger in one of Britain’s gallant argosies, and needing no alien interposition to smuggle the evangelist into a land which Britain *then* forbade the evangelist to tread, landing in open day, and beneath the glad assurance of the Union banner, he found the missionaries of two hemispheres, as well as Chinese Christians, there before him. And whilst we would join our dear friend in commemorating these bright distinctions of his lot, we record with special thankfulness the progress which he has already made as a Chinese scholar. The wonderful labours of Morrison and his coadjutors notwithstanding, the language still remains of all human dialects the mightiest barrier to intercourse; . . . and with all the helps afforded by his predecessors in this arduous work, and with all the facilities for quiet and unmolested study in an English settlement, we fully reckoned that years might pass before Mr. Burns could make any practical essay in that appalling tongue. Already, however, before faith and energy its terrors seem to disappear; and although it is only a year since our brother began to apply his mind to the study, and though he had only been two months arrived when last he wrote—we record it with joy and wonder—he was already attempting to publish the Word of life in the speech of Sinim. Having obtained access to the prisoners in the public jail, he was enabled to read the Scriptures to them, and even to address them briefly so that they understood.”

To this last incident he thus refers in his journal of date January 4th, 1848:—

“During the past month I have been making some progress in the Chinese, and have had some opportunities of bringing into use the measure of knowledge already acquired. A fortnight ago Dr. Morrison (whose little

daughter I still give a lesson to, and with whose Chinese comprador I read the Scriptures in English and Chinese) asked me to go and visit in the prison three Chinese criminals under sentence of death for murder, and who were in deep distress and anxious to be visited by the ministers of Christ. Unable to do much, I felt called to do what I could; and as the execution of the sentence was delayed longer than usual in consequence of the absence of the governor, I had almost daily opportunities of meeting these poor men. I generally went alone, but at other times in company with the Chinese preacher Chin-Seen. They were very anxious to hear of the way of salvation through Jesus, and evidently strove to understand my broken Chinese. Although unable to say much to them I made them read with me Christian books, and on several occasions I even joined with them in prayer, through the medium of their own tongue. They did not speak the Canton dialect, which I am chiefly studying, and this no doubt made my rude attempts less intelligible; yet I felt encouraged, and enjoyed, I think, something of the power of grace in praying with and for them. One of these poor men has received a commutation of his sentence.”

This first beginning of his work in the sphere of direct missionary effort is characteristic, and must have been peculiarly congenial to him. Like that divine Master in whose steps he walked so closely, it was ever his delight most of all and first of all to care for those for whom few else cared, to leave the ninety and nine in the safe and quiet pastures, and go to seek the utterly lost in the far wilderness. The publicans and sinners in the highways and hedges, the neglected crowds of railway labourers or factory workers, the soldiers in the rough barrack-room, or amid the terrible temptations of the great city streets, had ever, in his native land and in Canada, had a special attraction for him, as those to whom, as most needing, he owed the deepest debt of compassion and help. He loved to walk like Christ on the shady side of the world, and to be as a “brother born” to the sorrowful, the outcast, the forsaken. And so it was that in China by a singular coincidence it happened that his first care was directed to that very class to whom three hundred years before the apostolic Xavier had looked as the probable objects of his first missionary efforts—only that now in these happier times, it was not needful to become a prisoner in order to become the teacher of prisoners. It was quite in the spirit too of his whole life thus immediately to begin his work with such imperfect means of communication as were then at his disposal, instead of waiting until a more perfect knowledge of the language should have given him the advantage of dear and fluent utterance. In haste to reach the souls of those he had come so far to seek, he was impatient of the last barrier that still separated him from them; and if he could not yet break down that partition wall, he might yet at least hold broken converse with them through those narrow chinks and openings which he had already

made. He could speak only, indeed, with stammering words and broken sentences; but those stammering words and broken sentences might still convey some grains of the precious gold—reflect some glimmerings of the eternal saving light—and that infinite blessing he dared not even for a moment withhold. Besides, while seeking to teach those poor prisoners the way of life, he would be at the same time learning something from them. He would sharpen and polish his rude instrument in the very act of using it, exercise his stammering tongue and correct his broken sentences, while by their means he sought to instruct and comfort others.

It was on the same principle that, as he tells us in his first letter from Hong-Kong, he from the first attended regularly the daily Chinese service conducted by natives at the mission-house, and gave lessons in English to the boy that waited on him along with another, while “they repaid him with their Chinese, which he endeavoured to speak with them as best he could; sometimes succeeding in being understood, and sometimes provoking a smile only.” Dr. Hamilton I believe is perfectly right in attributing his remarkable success in mastering the difficulties and disarming “the terrors” of this singular tongue mainly to the “faith and energy ” with which he girded himself to the task. He had indeed naturally a more than ordinary faculty for the study of language, and that faculty had at an early period received the very best discipline and training; but the natural faculty was more than doubled by the intense and concentrated energy with which, when called for by the highest ends, he used it. Here, as in everything else which concerned the service of his divine Master, whatever his hand found to do he did it with his might. As before in the case of the French in Canada, so here he might be said for the time to have almost wholly lived in the element of Chinese thought and Chinese speech. He spoke Chinese, wrote Chinese, read Chinese, heard Chinese, sang in Chinese, prayed in Chinese. Far into the night sometimes might his voice be heard reciting aloud the words of life, or pouring out his heart before God in the broken accents of that strange tongue which for Christ’s sake he had determined with as little delay as possible to make his own. Six years after this, as I heard recently from a relative, when on a visit to England, he surprised a company of friends by suddenly pronouncing the blessing before meat in Chinese, and then calmly repeating the same in English. It was only an extreme instance of that which was in reality the ruling principle of his whole missionary life. From the first and in everything “to the Chinese he became as a Chinese that he might gain the Chinese”— lived in their world, thought their thoughts, spoke their words. It was thus alone, as it seems to me, that he was enabled in after-years, as the prompt and fearless pioneer of the missionary band, to make those rapid transitions from one sphere of labour to another, which required in each case the forgetting of one language and the learning of

another. The acquiring of a new Chinese dialect was comparatively an easy task to him, because he lived habitually in a Chinese element, and was thoroughly imbued with the very spirit of all Chinese thought and speech.

The following extracts from his journals and letters will still further illustrate the nature of his work, and the spirit which actuated him during the first, and necessarily in a great measure preparatory and tentative, part of his missionary life:—

*“Hong-Kong, Dec. 27th, 1847.—MY DEAR MOTHER,—I am again allowed the opportunity of addressing you from this distant shore, that you may know something of what I am doing, and that I may find at last some vent for those feelings which the thought of those from whom I am so far removed awakens. I have been, since I last wrote, going on with my Chinese studies, and I desire to be thankful that I am enabled to make a little progress, while the difficulties that still remain to be encountered before I can attain to anything like a full mastery of the language, are so many that, were it not for the greatness of the end in view, I would be disposed to abandon the undertaking.”* Then after referring to his visits to the prisoners, *“It is encouraging,”* he continues, *“even already to be able to point even in a few expressions to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world—to that Root of Jesse to whom the Gentiles are to seek and find his rest to be glorious. Among our own countrymen last Lord’s-day was interesting, as that on which for the first time a congregation met here in connection with the Presbyterian Church. The place of meeting at present is central and convenient (an old bungalow, immediately behind the club-house); and though the numbers attending may not at first be very large, yet it is hoped that by the blessing of God this may form the beginning of that which shall issue in important results, both among the Chinese and amongst our own countrymen.”*

To this congregation he continued to minister during the whole period of his stated residence in Hong-Kong, without, however, undertaking the task of constituting a regular church, or “entangling himself in any way that might retard his labours among the Chinese.” Meantime, while his spare time and spare thoughts were given to his countrymen, his main strength and his whole heart were still with those in whose behalf he had come, and with whom, in the whole circumstances of his life, he more and more identified himself. Leaving the comfortable lodging in a European family in which he had been at first received, he removed to a hired house of his own in the midst of the native population, where he might bury himself out of sight with Chinese companions and in a Chinese home. His mode of life there must have been a very humble one in the eyes even of his humbler neighbours, if one may judge from a significant incident which he afterwards playfully told me. There had been some commotion in the

neighbourhood in consequence of some petty robbery or other misdemeanour, and an excited crowd was passing before the door in eager pursuit of the culprit “Oh! you need not look there,” cried one from amongst the throng, “*it is only a poor foreigner.*”

“*Corner of Aberdeen Street, Queen’s Road, Tuesday, February 29th, 1848.*—During these two months mercy has abounded towards me. May I have grace to bless and glorify the God of my life and salvation! In my work among the British population I have been in some degree encouraged, though not in any manner fitted to show me that they ought to be the principal object of my efforts to promote the kingdom of God. Our meetings on Sabbath continue rather to increase, but on week-days very few attend. Early in January I began to feel my need of having the assistance of some native of this province to read with me, in order that I might get acquainted with the colloquial dialect, and acquire as far as possible the right mode of intoning each word—a point of the greatest importance in order to effective speaking, and one of the greatest difficulty. The Lord has graciously, I trust, guided me in this. A brother missionary spoke of my want to Mr. Gutzlaff, who kindly furnished me with a teacher, a young man from Canton city, whom I have found very suitable. He came to me on January 25th. After a week or two I found it would be desirable, in order to give full employment to my teacher, and also to open up my way into Chinese society, that I should get him if possible to open a small Chinese school; and I thought it would be well if I could get a house having accommodation for this purpose, and where I might myself live with none but Chinese around me, and so be obliged to speak the language at all times. It is in this view that I have taken the house in which I now am. I entered it a week ago (February 22d), and found myself alone, with none but my two Chinese servants, to whom, however, I had been providentially directed, and whom I found willing from the first day to come and worship with me. We read and have continued to read together in Matthew’s Gospel (Morrison’s version), and I pray with them imperfectly. These beginnings have encouraged me. ‘Who hath despised the day of small things?’ Yesterday my teacher came to live here, and he expects to be able to open a school in the lower flat of this house, which was formerly a druggist’s shop, and is very suitable for this purpose, and also for collecting a small congregation, should the Lord incline them to come, and give fitness to enter on the solemn work in a manner so public.”

But while he thus “thought it good to be left” amongst heathen strangers and amid strange associations and ways of life “alone,” he still did not feel lonely. Here as elsewhere to him one place differed from another mainly in

the degree in which he possessed the felt presence of God,<sup>1</sup> and enjoyed a holy freedom and enlargement of heart in His service. The chief effect of solitude was to bring him nearer to those from whom for the gospel's sake he had been so far separated, and to impart an increased tenderness and fervour to his affectionate remembrances and prayers:—On the 28th March he writes to his mother:—

“After having had worship with my Chinese family (two servants, a teacher, and three boys) I take up my pen to endeavour to hold some kind of communication, from this distant region of the earth, with those who are dearest to me on it. I feel, as I did last time, the want of hearing from any of you; but I have been comforted in some degree by the absence of any bad news, whether by the papers or by Mrs. K.'s letters. May the living and true God be the God and Redeemer and portion of each of my beloved friends, and be more and more gracious to, and more and more glorious in the eyes of my beloved parents as they advance to the borders of the unseen and eternal world! May you be enabled to say with the divine Psalmist, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth whom I desire besides thee: my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever!’ ‘As for me I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.’ May your faith be as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day! Oh! that I might hear in this far land of those of our dear kindred that as yet love not Jesus, having the eye divinely opened to behold His beauty and preciousness! For myself I am here in the midst of a people of a strange language, and who know not the true God nor Jesus Christ whom he hath sent to be the light and life of men, and yet I cannot say that I am solitary or forsaken. I feel indeed more at home here than I did when I was last among you in Scotland, when the weight of that call which I believe I obeyed in coming here was resting upon me, and making me as a stranger among my own kindred. When I last wrote I had newly taken up my abode here with my Chinese domestics, and had been encouraged by feeling able to read and pray with them (though feebly) in their own tongue. My teacher had not then joined me, and I was uncertain whether he would succeed in getting a school formed on the principles of the gospel. In this, however, I have been encouraged beyond my expectation. He got a few boys to come from a little distance of his own acquaintance, and as soon as he opened the school others came from the neighbourhood of their own accord; so that for the last fortnight he has had regularly from twelve to fifteen scholars. Were we to make any effort I believe we could get more; but in the first instance I want to go on gradually until the character of the school becomes fixed on right

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<sup>1</sup> The reader will remember the touching entry on . . . : “I think I can say through grace that God's presence or absence alone distinguishes places to me.”

principles, and until I see that it really promises to accomplish more than that which I sought it for at the outset, viz. bringing me into such intercourse with the people as might enable me to acquire the language as they speak it, and might open up the way for preaching the Word among them when I am able to do this. Three of the boys stay with us in the house, and all of them come regularly to worship in the morning, when we have a little meeting of seventeen or eighteen persons in all. The school is of course shut up on Sabbath, but the last two Sabbaths most of the boys have been with us most of the day learning a Christian book, and have also attended Chinese worship of their own accord at the chapel of the London Society, where a native at present officiates. Soon after the school was opened it was interesting to me one morning about six o'clock, and before any one was on foot but myself, to see a Chinese woman with a little boy of eleven or twelve knocking to be admitted to the school. I thought of that blessed time approaching when the mothers of China will bring their children to the feet of Jesus that he may bless them. The Chinese are diligent in learning after their own manner. They begin with the morning light and continue to con over their insipid task (insipid, as we would reckon it) until evening. They are an intelligent and interesting race, and when the gospel takes hold of them in elevating and saving power, they will be interesting in another manner."

Amid such quiet, patient, but unobtrusive labours the first fourteen months of his residence in Hong-Kong passed away. Longing for great things, yet not despising the day of small things, he was content meanwhile to occupy faithfully the narrow sphere assigned him, and to wait in patience till the great Master should open a wider door. The time, however, was now come for a further and bolder flight. His proficiency in the spoken language of the Canton province was now sufficient to enable him at least intelligibly to declare his message. The shores of continental China with its teeming towns and villages lay before his eyes, and he longed to be in the midst of the vast harvest-field. It was true that as yet the permissive liberty of intercourse with the native population was confined within the limits of the five open ports, nor had any Protestant missionary hitherto extended his labours much beyond their precincts. There would, he knew, be much difficulty and possibly some danger in the attempt; but there was no manifest impossibility, and an impossibility alone was in his view a sufficient hindrance to one who would go forward in a great work in the name of the Lord. He would at least knock at the door, and see whether that divine almighty hand would open it. "You desired," said he in one of his letters, "that three doors might be opened to me,—the door of entrance into the language, the door of access into the country, and the door of admittance for the Lord's truth into men's hearts. The first of these has been opened in

an encouraging degree already; and it now remains to seek by prayer and actual trial that the other two doors may be opened also.” He announced accordingly the discontinuance both of his Sunday English services and of the Chinese school at Hong-Kong, and steadfastly turned his face towards the “regions beyond:”—On January 29th, 1849, he writes:—

“The routine of my work hitherto has been in learning the Chinese language, with the important accompaniment of preaching from week to week among my own countrymen. Now, however, I am entering as far as can be foreseen on a new sphere and mode of labour, being about to discontinue my temporary position both among the Chinese and English, and go forth among the people of these shores with the Word of eternal life in my hands, and gradually also on my tongue. Yesterday (Sabbath, 28th) I intimated the discontinuance of my English preaching, and today I have given warning to my servants, &c., that the school, which is at present interrupted by the Chinese New Year, will not be again re-opened. To this decision I have been clearly led, as we have yet no prospect of any minister from Scotland, nor of any other missionary who might take up the educational part of the work among the Chinese, and I had but one alternative before me, viz. that of either proceeding to form a church and locating myself among my countrymen and in my Chinese school; or that of leaving both, and going forth into the field at large in order at once to attain in a proper manner the spoken language, and to spread abroad the gospel of salvation among these unsaved millions. This latter course I have felt it my duty to adopt, although it is one accompanied with many difficulties and dangers of different kinds. But the work must be done, and I am enabled joyfully to say, ‘Lord, here am I, send me.’ The young man who has been teaching the school and myself will not, I think, return to me; but the other two assistants will go forth, I trust, with me, and perhaps others also. Certainly my past habits and experience fit me above most preachers for attempting this mode of missionary work; but whether, and how far, I may be succeeded in it is with the Lord, at whose command alone I go forth. I need not add that in these circumstances I shall have special need of special prayer to be made in my behalf, and in behalf of the people among whom I may be led from time to time. China is not only forbidden ground to a foreigner, but it is a land of *idols* and a land *without a Sabbath*. How great then must be that power which can alone open up my way and make it successful! But JESUS hath said, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth;’ and JEHOVAH hath said to the Son, ‘Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.’ Let the weak then say, I am strong! I shall not add more by coming down to matters of lesser moment. May the souls of God’s people among you prosper and be in health, and may many be brought nigh who

are now far off in heart from the living God! With love to all who love the Lord and seek his face,—I am, dear mother, your affectionate son,—WM. C. BURNS."

The event fully justified the decision which he had taken, and the brave and resolute spirit in which he prepared himself for its accomplishment. The difficulties and dangers with which he laid his account were indeed not wanting, but in the midst of them all his way was opened and his course prospered to a degree which he had scarcely dared to hope. While there were frequent risks from the assaults of robbers and the jealous spirit and policy of the local authorities, he met everywhere amongst the great body of the people with that friendly reception which they have been since found in other cases to accord to any stranger who frankly casts himself upon their kindness. He possessed in large measure that genial human sympathy, and that quiet self-possession and promptitude of fit reply, which, Mr. Fortune tells us, form the best passports to the good humour and friendly entertainment of a Chinese crowd; and a foreigner who trusts himself in places where foreigners are rare must expect to live very much in the midst of crowds. So he found his way with comparatively little trouble or interruption from village to village, and seldom failed at least of a numerous and inquisitive, if not earnestly attentive audience. Even the personal privations and hardships which he had regarded as inevitable were much less serious than he had anticipated: so that he very soon sent back to Hong-Kong a heavy cloak which he had brought away with him, with the significant message that "he did *not* need to sleep on the hills." His chief danger throughout arose from the general repute, sadly belied in his case, of the untold wealth possessed by foreigners, and the consequent sensation produced among the robber-class by the arrival of a European stranger. Anything therefore in the shape of gold, or that looked like gold, he found the greatest possible hindrance to his quiet and peaceful progress, and a light purse the necessary condition of a light heart. Years after this I remember that when I gave him a small pocket-Bible in place of a much valued one which he had lost, he said with a significant smile, that his only objection to it was the gilt clasp, which he feared would one day attract the greedy eyes of some Chinese robber, and cause the theft of the book for the sake of the gold—an apprehension which was soon afterwards in point of fact fulfilled. From the following extracts it will be seen that such "perils of robbers" were the only serious perils he encountered in this difficult, and as it seemed to many at the time, somewhat daring undertaking:—

"*At Shap-Pat-Hœung (or Eighteen Villages), February 6th, 1849.*—MY DEAR MOTHER,—I have had the privilege of again hearing from you, and this privilege has been even greater than usual, from the fact which the date of this letter intimates, that I am now no more among our countrymen, but

am dwelling among this heathen people—*alone*, were it not for the presence of a covenant God and Saviour. In following out the purpose intimated in my last, I left Hong-Kong on Wednesday the 7th current for the opposite continent of China, and have been, since that time, going from place to place with my Chinese assistants and one servant, much as I used to do in Scotland in days that are past. In some places I have spent only one day; in others I have remained for a longer time, the population being large and the door open. As yet I have been furthered and prospered far beyond what I looked for; and although the difficulties are many, even of an outward kind, yet I do not despond in looking to the future. One of our difficulties arises from the constant fear the people are in of robbers, who suppose, though in my case without cause, that foreigners have much money with them; and again in places where there are mandarins a foreigner is likely to be dislodged at once. This was my experience at first setting out; for I had spent only one night at Cowloon, opposite to Hong-Kong, when I was warned to remove, and so had to retreat for the time. The people also at present are in constant apprehension of war with England, and this makes them more suspicious of foreigners who come into their borders. But with all this I have hitherto had great liberty of access to the population, and as far as I have been able to declare my message I have found attentive, and in some cases earnestly attentive hearers. . . . The valley I am now in is full of villages, as its name intimates. It is also the seat of a market held nearly every third day, to which the people of the surrounding country resort, and this makes it an important centre of operations. Yesterday—the Christian Sabbath—was the market-day here. I was out among the people about three hours, and had much support from God. What need have I of the presence of the Lord of the Sabbath in a land like this, that I may not lose my own soul in seeking to save the souls of others! I shall probably need to leave this place soon, as the master of the house I am now in does not promise us lodgings even for another night. But the Lord will provide. “They shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

It will have been observed with what feeling he speaks of his position in finding himself for the first time in a Sabbathless land, and of the dreary round of the secular market-days, irrespective of all the hallowed mementos and signs of a higher world. He often recurs to this, and evidently felt it as the sorest of all privations—almost like the blotting out of the sun from the sky of his daily life. His words vividly remind one of the feelings expressed by the Psalmist, when, under a similar sense of spiritual deprivation and exile, he remembered the Lord from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, and from the hill Mizar. “When I remember these things my soul is cast down within me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude

that kept holy-day. Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." It was under the impulse of such feelings that he would from time to time break away from his solitary labours amongst those heathen villages, and make a rapid visit to the comparatively Christian community at Hong-Kong, for the sake "of retirement and the privileges of the Christian Sabbath." He snatched one of those seasons of sacred retreat about a month after the date of the letter just quoted: but after a brief space he is again at his work, and dates the 16th April, from "the village of Pan-Seen, to the north of Hong-Kong about eighty-five miles:"—

"DEAR MOTHER,—After writing you from Hong-Kong at the end of last month, I remained there a few days longer, to enjoy the advantage of retirement and the privileges of a Christian Sabbath, and on the 4th of the present month returned again to this continent of China. Since coming back I have visited four villages of 1000 to 1500 inhabitants each, remaining generally for a few days, and embracing such opportunities as are given me, both in going out among the people, and in the visits which many pay to us, to make known something of the gospel message. We were some time ago invited to come to the village where we now are; and not only do we here enjoy the fullest external liberty to speak to the people, but there are some who receive us with much cordiality, and seem to manifest some interest in our message. One man in particular who this evening worshipped with us seems as if his mind were opening to the truth. But ah! when I speak thus you must not judge of such a case as if it were similar to those which we remember at Kilsyth, Dundee, and Perth, in days that are past! There is among this people no Sabbath, no Bible, no distinct knowledge even of the existence of one only living and true God; and in my present circumstances it is not a little encouragement to find tokens even of a distinct and cordial apprehension of the simplest principles of divine truth. How little are many who neglect the great salvation among you aware that they are indebted for all that is pure and elevated in their knowledge to that holy Book which they despise! Were it not my abiding conviction that the Lord hath sent me here, and that His grace can be made sufficient for us in all circumstances, I would sometimes be overwhelmed when regarding the state of this blinded people, and the danger to which my own soul is exposed in dwelling among them. From day to day I have enjoyed many tokens of the Lord's guiding and supporting hand; but while this is the case, I cannot say that as yet I have seen any clear indications in the state of this people that the day of their spiritual deliverance is at hand. In other days it has been my solemn privilege to enter into the labours of others, and it may be that here I am to labour where others are to reap. . . . *April 17th*,—This morning I resume my pen in haste to conclude this letter. From morning to morning the Lord's

mercies are ever new. Great is His faithfulness. . . . I am about today to remove to a village further on. My messenger waits, and I must in haste conclude, praying for all covenant blessings to my beloved parents, kindred, &c., and for grace and peace to all the churches of the living God.—I ever am,” &c.

At his first starting from Hong-Kong he had characteristically “left his assistants to direct the boat to any quarter,” on the long extended coast, “they thought best,” having “no other plan but that of making known the gospel by tracts and speech, leaving all the rest, as well as this the greatest, to the gracious care of God.” And so he went on from day to day in his work of faith and patience, passing on from village to village with the divine message, which it was the joy of his life to declare, simply as the Unseen Hand of his Master seemed to open and point the way—now lingering for a while in one spot, now pressing rapidly on, as the Pillar of Cloud appeared to halt or to move onwards before him. “As soon as he reached a village, he commenced to read his Bible aloud, say, under the shade of a tree—soon the villagers began to gather, and he explained to them the nature and object of the Gospel. Usually someone would ask him at mealtime where he was to eat? and he as usually partook of what was set before him by some hospitable villager. As evening approached, someone would offer him a night’s shelter; and thus he often went on from week to week, preaching the word, and lacking nothing.” Meanwhile, it was his lot almost wholly “to plough in hope, and to sow in hope,”—intensely longing for the fruit of souls, yet willing either to gather it in with his own hands or to sow the seeds of a harvest to be reaped by others. The entries in his journal are at this period singularly brief and hurried—mere jottings, evidently hastily noted down overnight in the midst of outward discomforts and almost constant movement—but only on that account speak the more impressively of the abundance and self-denying nature of his labours:

“We went to Cowloon, but they took me to a school-house rented by the London Mission, and after one day’s stay among a listless people we were obliged to leave in consequence of the mandarin’s remonstrating with the landlord of the house. On Thursday the London missionaries came over, and I went back with them to the Chinese Medical Hospital (Hong-Kong). On Friday we again landed directly opposite at Tseen-Sha-Tein, had good openings and favour among the villages, and lodged in a mat-shed—I eating, as I had the previous day, and have done since, with my Chinese companions, but not putting on in the meantime any part of the Chinese dress.

“On Saturday we removed to Tseen Wan (Shallow Bay) village, a distance of perhaps twenty-five Chinese miles; the people very friendly, but generally speaking the Hak-ka, not the Puntee or Canton city dialect. Here

we remained until Wednesday (yesterday), when we crossed the hills, a distance of 20 or 25 Chinese miles (probably 7 or 8 English miles), to this valley covered with villages (Shap-Pat-Hœung). Today I have been out, and have had more encouragement in the aspect of the people, and also in my ability to communicate to them the great truths, (1) That there is but one true God, His character, &c.; (2) That all men are sinners—idolaters, &c.; and (3) That there is a Saviour and only one, Jesus the Son of the living God.

“*Shap-Pat-Hœung*.—Much encouraged at Pat-Hœung. Left it on Tuesday the 20th. 21st at Cum-Teen. Many people—attention—at night fear of robbers. 22d. Came here. Door opened. Many people. Attention.

“*Shum-Chan, March 8th, Monday*.—Came here on Friday, after being six days at Shap-Pat-Hœung, and three days at Sin-Teen. People friendly. Arrived on the market-day. Great press to see the foreigner, but all friendly. On Saturday messenger arrived from Hong-Kong—robbed by the way of the money he was bringing. In my own room—not an every-day privilege in this land—*Oh! for the Spirit of grace to improve it.*

“*Chinese Hospital, Hong-Kong, March 29th*.—We stayed at Shum-Chan until Wednesday the 14th, visiting the surrounding villages. 14th. Removed westward to Sheung-Poo-Tan, visiting villages to the west, Kak-Teen, Kong-Ha, Wong-Kong, &c., eight days. At Sheung-Poo-Tan, people very friendly and attentive—Kak-Teen, not so. Thursday, returned to Shum-Chan; invited to go back into the country; crossed the Yuen-Long, and thence on foot to Pai-Teung beside Cap-Shui-Man, and thence by boat to this place—way prospered—arrived here at six o’clock P.M., just as Dr. Hirschberg, a dear brother who gives us lodging here, was about to land from Cowloon, to which he goes every Monday. Here I have ordered a Chinese dress, and I trust that next week I may again go forth into the country. The seven weeks I have already spent there have been full of encouragement”

Brief as these itinerary notes are, they will give the reader a tolerably distinct idea of the character of the missionary’s life and work during this first and tentative effort to carry the gospel message into the interior of the Chinese territory. The lodging in the “mat-shed;” the frequent alarms of robbers; the arrival of the messenger from Hong-Kong without the expected money supplies; the summary dismissal by the mandarin and the friendly bearing of the people generally; the eager rush at the market town “to see the foreigner;” the valleys thick-sown with villages; the journeys on foot, without purse or scrip or change of raiment, over the hills; the significant and touching allusion to the rare privilege of a night “in his own room;” the brief breathing time of retirement and prayer, in the midst of the poor and suffering, in the Chinese hospital,—all, naked as they are alike of detail and colouring, form together the elements of a picture of apostolic faith and zeal,

and self-denying labour which rises to the mind's eye as vivid as it is impressive and rare.

The reader will have noticed too, the passing allusion to his gradual adoption at this time of the Chinese habits alike in food and in dress; a matter in which, I believe, he has been hitherto almost entirely singular amongst missionaries of the Protestant faith. The circumstance admits of easy explanation. I daresay there was to him a certain charm in being thus entirely like to those whose servant he desired to be for Christ's sake, and thus visibly to walk in the steps of him who would "be all things to all men if by any means he might save some." But that was not his main reason, or one which he himself ever gave. His practice in this respect was singular, mainly because his sphere of labour and his circumstances were singular. Within the limits of the five open ports, or in any place where the sight of a foreigner is a common and everyday occurrence, there was in his view no advantage whatever in the adoption of the Chinese dress and mode of life; but in inland towns and villages it was essential, unless one wished to be the centre of a noisy street crowd, and to be gazed at like a gorilla or an ourang-outang. He found it of the greatest importance, with a view to the peaceful prosecution of his work, to avoid this, and therefore he did avoid it. When Dr. Morrison arrived at Hong-Kong, "he adopted," says Dr. Medhurst, "the dress and manners of the natives, allowing his hair and nails to grow, eating with the chopsticks, and walking about the factory in thick Chinese shoes. In this, as he afterwards acknowledged, he meant well, but he judged ill; for in the first place the confinement and hard fare injured his health; then, his singular habits deprived him of the association of his countrymen; and lastly, his intercourse with the natives was hindered rather than helped by it. Had he been residing entirely among the Chinese, far separated from Europeans, the adoption of the Chinese costume might have prevented immediate observation and conduced to permanent settlement; but in Canton, where there is a marked difference between the Chinese and Europeans, the attempt to unite the habits of such opposite classes only excited the animadversions and suspicions of both. The Catholics in Macao dress all their priests and catechists in the European costume, which is a sort of protection against native interference; *but when they send agents into the interior, they clothe them after the Chinese fashion, in order to avoid the gaze of the populace, and the annoyance of the police.* These sagacious and discriminating remarks, written more than thirty years ago, have been since fully justified by the experience of those who, whether as missionary or scientific pioneers, have passed beyond the lines of European residence, and pushed their way "into the regions beyond." There, for a foreigner simply to show himself in his foreign dress is to become the signal for the assembling of an idle and inquisitive crowd, which grows and swells as he passes along.

A graphic instance may be given from Mr. Fortune's interesting narrative of a *Residence among the Chinese, Inland, on the Coast, and at Sea*. "When we landed from our boats," says he, "a large crowd assembled round us, and followed us into the city (Pinghoo), increasing as we went along. Every now and then a little urchin ran past to give warning on ahead, so that we found the whole street aware of our approach, and every door and window crowded with anxious faces. All went on quite well, however, although the crowd contained some mischievous looking fellows in its ranks. When we entered a shop the scene outside was quite fearful. The street was very narrow and literally crammed with human beings, all anxious to see us and to find out what we were buying. In more than one instance the pressure was so great as to endanger the fronts of the shops; and anxious as the Chinese are for trade, I believe the poor shop-keepers were heartily glad when they got rid of us." An introduction like this into any community could scarcely facilitate the quiet discharge of any serious work, and least of all the furtherance of that eternal kingdom which "cometh not with observation." In rapid missionary journeys, indeed, by canal or river, where the object is simply to distribute books and declare the gospel message at each village and hamlet by the way, and then pass quickly on, the singularity of the European dress may be even of advantage, as signaling the stranger's arrival, and immediately gathering an eager audience round him. The little unwonted excitement passes off harmlessly, as the strange visitor is off and away before the crowd has grown into a tumult and suspicious citizens and jealous mandarins have taken the alarm. But to make a more lengthened sojourn in such a community, and go about one's work steadily and quietly, one must cease to wear the garb of a stranger.

After about a week's repose, Mr. Burns was again at his work (April 1st), and continued his evangelistic movements amongst the continental villages for about six weeks longer, pushing his way still further inland to the north and the west. At the close of that period, however, the hot and rainy season rendered further progress for the present impracticable, while at the same time the more suspicious and less friendly attitude of the people as he advanced westward gradually more and more closed the door against him. He accordingly returned to Hong-Kong, and took up his abode in a manner somewhat more permanent, under the friendly roof of his endeared friend Dr. Hirschberg, first on Morrison's Hill and then at his new hospital in Victoria.

Here he remained, with only one brief interruption, for the next eight months, perfecting his knowledge of the Chinese language, and becoming, as he says, less and less "at home with the pen and more with the Chinese pencil;" doing the work of a Barnabas amongst the sick and suffering in the hospital beside him; and co-operating zealously with his esteemed host in all

his other works and labours of love. But the nature of his occupations during this quiet interval, as well as the views and aspirations which animated him, will be best learned from his own words, which will appropriately close the history of this first stage of his Chinese life:—

“*Chinese Hospital, Hong-Kong, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1849.*—MY DEAR MOTHER,—  
My last letter would not prepare you for hearing from me again so soon, and that too from this place. I went on last occasion more to the westward (having already visited a good part of those who speak my dialect to the north), and there we found the people everywhere so averse to the presence of a foreigner, that after sleeping nine successive nights on the water in going from place to place, and not being allowed to lodge on shore, I returned here, where I have again resumed my quiet studies, and where I enjoy opportunities of doing what I can amongst this people, not only in speaking to the patients in the hospital, but in visiting others in the neighbourhood. The season also at present, both from great rain and great heat, is not so favourable for that mode of life which I have been following for some previous months on the opposite continent. I trust that in due time my path may be further opened, and that it may graciously be made plain by the Lord in what way and in what place I am to be more permanently employed upon these shores. I do not think at present of returning to the continent, but it is possible that my path may be made plain to do so sooner than I can anticipate. Perhaps you are by this time aware that Dr. James Young, a much valued friend here, offered himself some time ago to the Presbyterian Church in England as a missionary. The last mail has brought to him the intimation of his offer of service being accepted; but where and how we may be located and employed on these shores is not yet fully determined; nor can Dr. Y. leave his present employment until the close of the present year. It was a great mercy that in my last journey as well as in the two previous ones I was preserved from every danger, although surrounded with perils seen and unseen. The night before I landed here we were not, I suppose, above half a mile from a Macao passage-boat when it was attacked by pirates and robbed with the loss of some lives. The firing was so loud that, in the darkness, we supposed it must be some English war-steamer in pursuit of pirates. I was at this time on board the Chinese passage-boat from Canton, and no evil was allowed to come nigh to us. The person who has charge of the Chinese hospital where I am now lodged is a converted Jew, Dr. Hirschberg, connected with the London Missionary Society. I have long enjoyed his friendship, and now for a season I am very favourably situated in lodging with him, both for learning the language and for speaking a little among the patients who come seeking cure to their bodily diseases. It is little indeed, however, that I can add regarding tokens of an encouraging nature among the people. But the day of mercy and

deliverance promised will come, and then these ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord. You have need to pray for all of us who labour here, that we may be endued with a patient and persevering spirit, for the natural and spiritual difficulties of the field are of no common kind. . . . Commend me, dear mother, to the prayers of God's people. May you and my father never forget me, when, either one or both, you draw near the glorious high throne of our Father in heaven. Jesus is the way. In His blood we have access: in Him we are complete!"

Again, about a month after, July 25th, he writes:—

"I take up my pen (not so much used in these days as my Chinese pencil) to write a few lines that you may know something of my present affairs. During the past month I have been quietly resident here; and while I have thus enjoyed much leisure for study, I have also had daily opportunities of taking part, both as a hearer and as a speaker, in the meetings which are held for the good of the patients and of the household. As I had no present need for my former native assistants who journeyed with me on the mainland, they left me more than a month ago, and I am thus in the meantime alone, and co-operating with others as formerly at home and in my own tongue. This kind of position suits me, and will probably continue to be my position here until at least Dr. Young is ready to join me, which is not until the beginning of next year. . . . Do not cease, dear parents, to pray for me, that I may be still graciously kept and divinely quickened and enlarged in the way of God's testimonies. The removal of such pillars as John M'Donald and also Sir Andrew Agnew would overwhelm the minds of God's people, were it not that they are not man-worshippers, but have their faith staid on Him who ever liveth, and hath an unchangeable priesthood. While Jesus lives, the Church which is His body shall live also, each member receiving by faith out of His fulness and grace for grace. How securely must the Church of the living God be built, when it can stand unshaken while so many who seemed to be pillars are removed! But in the Church above, those who are 'made' to be pillars 'shall go no more out.' Blessed, holy, glorious society of the redeemed in the presence of God and the Lamb! May our hearts be ever there until amazing grace open the door of that inner sanctuary, and call us to come in! Oh! when shall the nations on earth—the many millions of these distant Gentiles—hear the call of the Son of God, bringing them into the Church below to be prepared for the Church above! The change will be great indeed when this takes place! May we have grace to pray and labour that the time may be hastened! You will remember me, dear father, to all who ask of my welfare, and engage the praying to pray much and more in our behalf, and that China's gates may be opened to the King of glory!"

One more effort (November, 1849) to resume his evangelistic labours on the mainland, in which he was met with obstacles still more formidable than

on the last occasion, and returned, robbed and stripped of everything but the clothes necessary to cover him, and his work at Hong- Kong and its vicinity closed. He sailed with Dr. Young, whose brief but bright career was for the next four years intimately associated with his, for Canton on the last day of February, 1850.