

WILLIAM C BURNS



SCOTLAND: CROSS of St. ANDREW



ENGLAND: CROSS of ST. GEORGE



SINGAPORE



MALAYSIA

GRANDFATHER
of
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIANS

by

Timothy Tow

WILLIAM C BURNS

1815 - 1868

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INTRODUCTION

My maternal great grandfather, Tan Khai-Lin, also known as Tan Su-Chuan, was born in 1838 into the family of a Manchu mandarin in the prefectural city of Chaon-chow-foo. He lost his father at an early age, and grew up under the tutelage of his widowed mother. A good student, he became a lover of books and calligraphy. He was a model of a filial son with a gentle disposition.

In 1859 when he was 21 years of age, he came from the inland capital to Swatow (Santou) the coastal city to look for a job. As he passed by the Mission Hall at Seng Peng Street where Rev George Smith the missionary was preaching, he was gripped by the Word. Seeing how gladly such an intelligent and cultured young man had drunk in the Gospel, the missionary invited him to stay. After several days of further inquiry into the Truth, Tan returned to his hometown. When he declared to his mother the joy of his newfound faith, she became deeply distressed. However, Su-Chuan prevailed upon her with the Truth. Thus, he was permitted to make the trip to Swatow again. Having been fully catechised he was baptised the same year, the first convert of the English Presbyterian Mission. (His mother followed suit after three years.)

Attached to the Mission Hall at this time was a clinic. When the clinic was shifted out some years later, the premises were converted into a school for the training of preachers. This training school began with an enrolment of four students. Tan Su-Chuan who all these years had understudied the missionaries tutored the students. He was elected elder and appointed to the pulpit of the First Church in Swatow. He served also several other churches such as were in the Kit-Yang — Poo-Sua circuit.



*Rev Tan Khai-lin
(Su-Chuan)
the author's Great grandfather
1838 - 1893*

In 1881 he took the first examination prescribed for pastors, and was ordained the next year. Immediately, he was made superintending minister to four churches centering around Iam-Tsau, birthplace of my grandfather and father.

Converts Began to Emigrate to Singapore

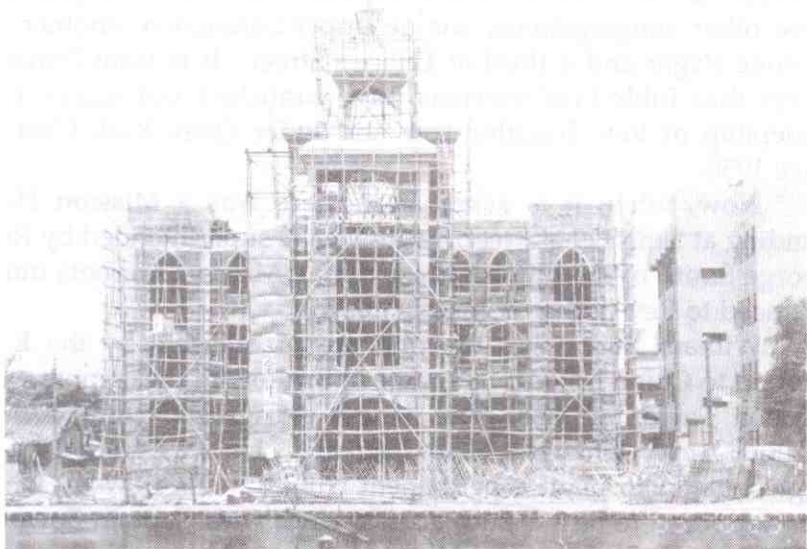
It was in 1881 the same year my great grandpa sat for his ordination examinations that the English Presbyterian Mission diverted the Rev John A B Cook, after one year's language study in Swatow, to Singapore. For a goodly number of the Mission's converts in Swatow had migrated south to Singapore and the Malay States for a better livelihood. One of the earliest migrants was Elder Heng Chiang Mong (1856-1931), father of Elder Heng Mui Kiah and grandfather of Dr Andrew Heng and Rev Philip Heng. But they were like sheep without a shepherd. In 1881 the E.P. Mission, under Rev Cook's supervision, organised the first Chinese Presbyterian Church at Bukit Timah which continues to this day as Glory Presbyterian Church. In 1883 he organised three other congregations, one at Upper Serangoon, another at Tanjong Pagar and a third at Prinsep Street. It is from Prinsep Street that Bible-Presbyterians have branched out under the leadership of Rev Timothy Tow and Elder Quek Kiok Chiang since 1950.

Now, when it is asked how there was a Mission Hall standing at Seng Peng Street, Swatow 1859 superintended by Rev George Smith of the English Presbyterian Mission, its roots must be traced to Rev William Chalmers Burns.

William Burns was the first missionary sent by the E.P. Mission to China in 1847. He came to Swatow in the company of Hudson Taylor in 1856, after having evangelised Hong Kong, Canton, Amoy, Shanghai, and Nanking. He was guided by a Higher Hand to plant a permanent church in Swatow by what was supposed to be a chance acquaintance with Captain Bowers, of the ship Geelong. (The story of Burns, Hudson Taylor and Captain Bowers will be told in a later chapter.)



The Old Iam-Tsau Church, 1984



The New Iam-Tsau Church rebuilt with overseas funds, 1993

*Our Fathers sat in prisons dark
Amidst South China's plain,
Till one from England did embark;
Bearing the Light from Heaven.*

*The vessel whom the Lord had sent:
His name was William Burns.
To Hongkong Island first he went
In eighteen forty-seven.*

*From thence sped he forth to Canton,
But God soon turned his step
To Amoy where he found a town
That gladly sought his help.*

*'Twas in Amoy he did settle,
That God's Word might go forth.
From thence again he went to battle,
Farther, yet farther north.*

*To Shanghai, and on to Nanking:
He scanned her from the bow.
But meanwhile God was planning
To bring him to Swatow!*

*The Captain of a British ship
Offered to take him south,
And so in eighteen fifty-six
On Swatow soil he ploughed.*

'Twas on this trip to our city,
That Hudson Taylor came
With Burns in the same ministry,
And they were not ashamed.

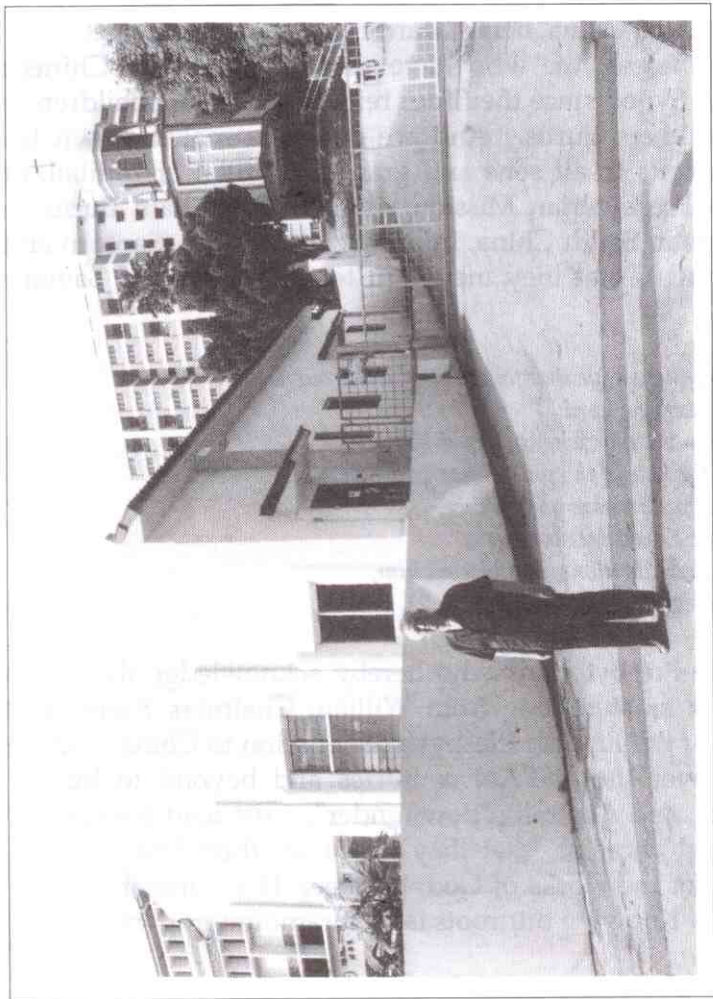
As the gospel grew and flourished
In Swatow and Amoy,
From these havens our sires cherished
Sailed southwards ships ahoy!

Our Fathers came to Singapore
And Malay States beyond.
A church soon sprang on this new shore
By eighteen eighty-one.

Among the first congregations
Was one at "Bamboo Tree",
Founded by the E.P. Mission
In eighteen eighty-three.

There stood before on Prinsep Street
An old, grey, little church.
'Twas here from the nineteen fifties
That we have grown so quick...





First Chinese Presbyterian Church, Bukit Timah, 1881
newly rebuilt with author on foreground.

In the background is Glory Presbyterian Church.
Author's grandfather was once pastor of the "ancient" Church.

Today the name of William Chalmers Burns and his mighty works is forgotten by our mother church and by the once powerful English Presbyterian Mission now under the deadly haze of liberalism and ecumenism. Nor is the pure Gospel he preached, sounding so loud and clear to his generation both in Great Britain and China, being heard in this tumultuous age.

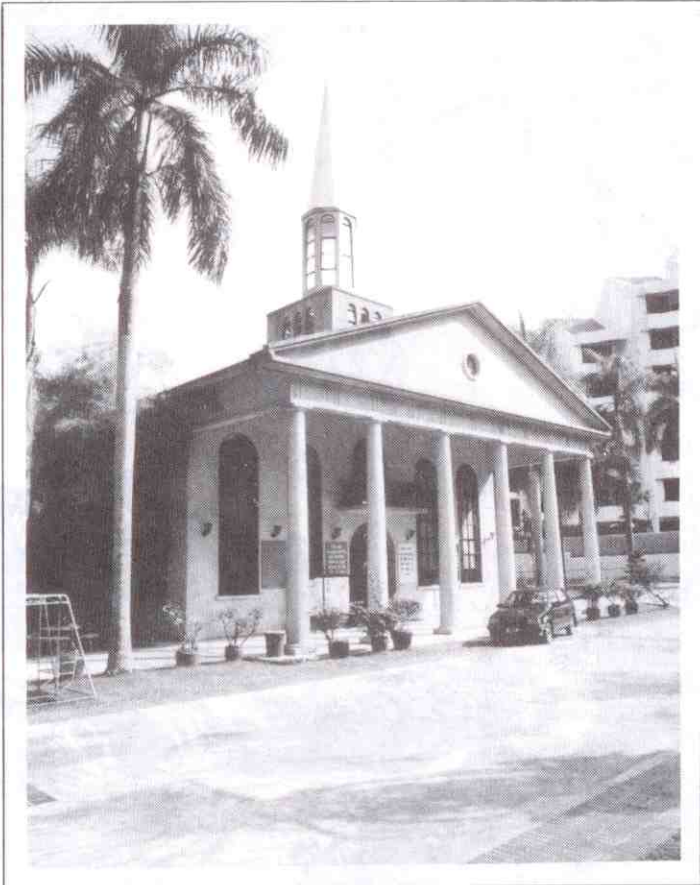
Nevertheless, we who have seceded from the Chinese Presbyterian Synod since the fifties remain filial grandchildren to William Chalmers Burns. And we desire to make known his glorious exploits to all sons and grandsons, filial or unfilial, of the English Presbyterian Mission which sent William Burns to our ancestors in South China, in particular Swatow (Santou) and Amoy (Xiamen), that they may turn to their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness,
ye that seek the Lord:
look unto the rock whence ye are hewn,
and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.
Look unto Abraham your father,
and unto Sarah that bare you:
for I called him alone, and blessed him,
and increased him" (Isaiah 51:1,2).*

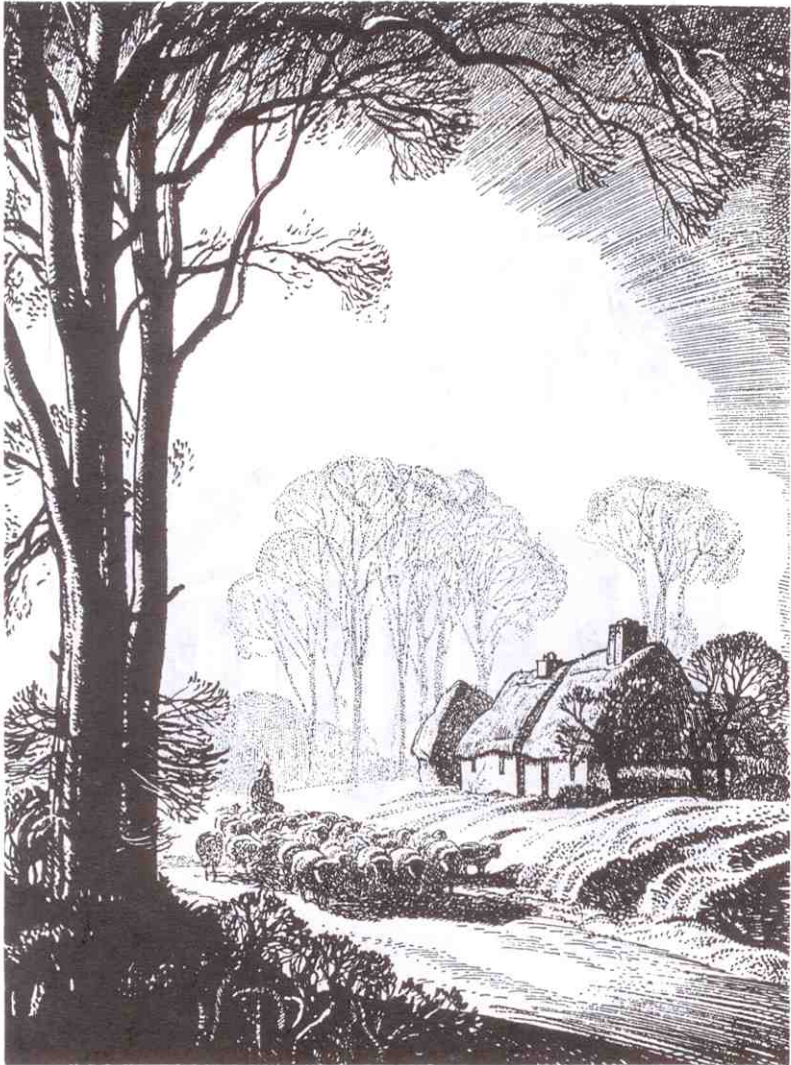
Today, Bible-Presbyterians who hereby acknowledge the origin of their faith as stemming from William Chalmers Burns, first missionary of the English Presbyterian Mission to China, and are spread all over the ASEAN countries and beyond to Burma, India, Africa, and Australia "downunder", must read the story of their spiritual ancestor "that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7). Knowing our roots is of paramount importance ...

*"And might not be as their fathers,
a stubborn and rebellious generation;
a generation that set not their heart aright,
and whose spirit was not steadfast with God
... And forgat his works, and his wonders
that he had shewed them". (Psalm 78:8,11)*

William Burns should not only move us in this Laodicean age to first-love fervency in the Lord's service, but also strengthen our stand against the unbelief and apostasy of the end-times inasmuch as he had stood on the side of the Separatists of his time against the old decaying Church, as you will discover. So read on!



Life Bible-Presbyterian Church,
mother of B-P Churches
in Singapore and Malaysia,
that are now spread around the world.



Typical Scene of a Scottish Farmland

CHAPTER I

YEARS OF EARNEST PREPARATION

A Glorious Heritage

William Chalmers Burns was born in a Scottish manse on April 1, 1815. He was one of ten children of godly parents in a land mightily blessed by the 16th Century Reformation. One hundred years before his birth God's Spirit was again outpoured on Kilsyth (where his father was now pastor) and the neighbouring parishes. Kilsyth is a little town twelve miles east of Glasgow.

Through reading some of the old records the senior Mr Burns was moved to preach on the need of revival, for what was once a godly country a century ago had sunken to a new low. He found a hearty echo from the oldest members of his congregation who had heard of the good old days from their parents and grandparents. Thus, from an early age, William was brought under the Gospel sound of his father's revivalistic preaching.

Apart from Sabbath services (which he could not escape since he lived in the Church environs) he was nurtured further by a half-hour of family devotions every Sunday morning and another hour of evening assignment, of reading religious books. As William was fond of sports and recreation, he would quietly slip out of the parsonage during the afternoon sessions with fishing rod or gun — much to the sorrow of his parents. A country church set in a landscape of rolling fields and woods with a river flowing through, Burns would be found more often

than not in the open, catching fish or shooting birds. Like many other young lads of his age his ambition was to be a farmer.

Turning to the World

But a lawyer uncle in Aberdeen had nobler plans for the boy. When he reached thirteen, his uncle got him transferred from the local parish school to the Aberdeen Grammar School. Here Burns began to excel as a student. He entered Aberdeen University where after two years he won "honourable distinctions" or straight "A's". When he returned home in 1831, he had decided now to follow in his uncle's footsteps to become a lawyer, for he frankly remarked that "lawyers were rich and lived in fine houses". This was a great disappointment to his father who had hoped his son would succeed him as a minister of the Gospel. It was with greatest reluctance that he gave his parental consent.

With this high prospect in view, William darted off to Edinburgh to join his uncle Alexander Burns, W.S. as an articled clerk. (W.S. = "Writer to the Signet," Scottish term for a solicitor or attorney). "Man proposes, God disposes," or as King Solomon puts it, "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24). In order to be articled, he had to produce his college certificates. For some reason one of those certificates did not arrive which delayed his acceptance. While nervously waiting, something happened overnight which turned William right around. This found him returned to his father's manse in Kilsyth.

Turning Back to God

"Why, Willie, what has brought you back?" exclaimed his mother.

"I've come from Edinburgh."

"How did you come?"

"I walked." (He walked 36 miles all the way from Edinburgh. Perhaps this gave him more time to think it over.)

Silence fell, as son and mother faced each other in the kitchen. Then the silence was gently broken, "Mamma, what do you think, if I should become a minister after all!"

O, what joy, to see the prodigal son come home! It was now Uncle's turn to feel that great disappointment.

How Burns Got Converted

How William Burns made this roundabout turn is recorded in his memoirs:

"The means by which my change of heart was brought about were these, I think -- my father's preaching; the fear of sudden death from cholera, an epidemic which was then claiming many lives, one of my uncles among them; a letter from my sisters at home in which they spoke of themselves as pilgrims going to Zion and leaving me behind. I could think of parting with Christ without pain for as yet I knew Him not, but to part from my godly parents and happy home forever was too much for me to bear.

"In this way I was prepared. In one moment while reading a passage of Pike's *Early Piety*, which my dear father had given me on leaving home, my inmost soul was in one instant pierced as with a dart. God had apprehended me. In my bedroom I poured out my heart for the first time with tears and a cry for mercy. In the same instant I felt I must leave my present occupation and devote myself to Jesus Christ in the ministry of the glorious Gospel by which I had been saved. From that day to this I have been conscious of the possession of a new and holy principle leading me to live by the faith of Jesus to the glory of God and in the communion of the Holy Ghost."

From Conversion to Consecration

"For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul" is the sum total of every one called of the Lord from serving the world to serving in the Kingdom of God. Instead of studying law in Edinburgh, God had turned him around to study theology in Glasgow. "Yes, it was now his

**MAP
OF
BRITISH
ISLES**



uncle's turn to acquiesce reluctantly in his decision to transfer from Law to Divinity."

Years of Hard Study

Before entering Glasgow for Divinity studies, Burns had to return to Aberdeen University to complete his curriculum in Arts. He received his Master of Arts in 1834. During his second term at his alma mater he rubbed shoulders with James Hamilton, later renowned minister of the Gospel in London, and with William Arnot, soon to become a famous Bible expositor. With them "he spent many hallowed hours of sweet communion in conference and in prayer." "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (*Proverbs 27:17*). Burns won a medal for Greek. On top of that he studied French and Gaelic which he also excelled. No doubt God was honing his linguistic skills, to meet the demands of learning a more difficult language at a later day.

Call to Foreign Missions

When at Glasgow, he was a founding member of the Students Missionary Society, through which he heard the call to overseas service from a missionary soon to sail for China. He was doubly sure now of God's appointment for his young life.

As his graduation from Glasgow drew near, Burns solemnly reflected: "I am approaching, as you know, an era of my history, if we except the time of conversion, the most important that can occur to a human being in this world — soon must I offer myself, miserable as I am, to the Church of God as a candidate for the work of an evangelist; and still more, that church must decide, so great is the honour, to have in prospect, whether in this land or among the perishing heathen it shall be my lot to preach to sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ crucified."

During those crucial weeks he sat in the valley of decision, his mother went to Glasgow one day to transact some business,

when she saw her son rounding a street corner towards her. He was lost in deep thought and did not notice her until she spoke to him first. "Mother, I'm sorry I did not see you. While walking along Argyle Street just now, I was so overcome with the vision of the countless crowds of souls rushing headlong into a Christless eternity, perishing, perishing. I could bear it no longer, and turned in here to seek relief in quiet thought."

Graduating from Glasgow University and successfully passing further examinations for his preaching license William Chalmers Burns M.A. was permitted to preach the Gospel as a probationer for the ministry by the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow, March 27, 1839, a few days before attaining 24 years of age. What should the next step be? Here is his testimony to the way God had led him to and beyond this point.

Preliminary Service at Home

"At Glasgow University, during the winter 1837-38, I was led, from my connection with the College Missionary Association to feel so deeply my personal responsibility in regard to the spread of the gospel among the heathen, that after much prayer and many solemn exercises of soul, I took the solemn step of writing to my father, to request that, if he thought good, he should communicate with Dr Gordon, the convener of our India Committee, and let him know that, should the Church deem me qualified, I would be ready to go as a missionary to Hindustan. He did this, and the Committee having given me encouragement in the matter, I looked upon myself as publicly devoted to the missionary field. In my own soul, and in all my public duties connected with missionary meetings, etc., etc., I felt from that time forward a greatly enlarged measure of the presence and blessing of God, tending to confirm me more deeply in my cherished hope and purpose.

"This was the last Session which I needed to spend at College to complete my curriculum; but, partly because I found myself profitably engaged in study, and still more, I believe, because I waited in expectation of a call to the missionary field, I

remained at College during the following winter, and in the spring of 1839 a proposal was made by the Colonial Committee that I should go out for a season to fill a charge at St John's, New Brunswick, and proceed direct from America to India when the India Committee should require me. It was expected that the India Committee would accede to this proposal but they refused, wishing that their agents should be free to go when wanted, and so the matter ended.

"This was at the very time when Mr M'Cheyne, about to set out for Palestine, wrote, asking me to take his place at Dundee. I found myself unexpectedly free to do this, and being speedily licensed I entered on my duties in that memorable field. This was at the beginning of April. In the month of June or July I received the call that I had long looked for, being asked by the India Committee to go to Poona in the Presidency of Bombay. My engagement at Dundee stood in the way of my at once complying, and another call which the Jewish Committee gave me to go to Aden and Arabia increased the difficulty.

"While asking guidance in regard to my duty, I went to the Communion at Kilsyth in July, when the Lord began to employ me in a way so remarkable for the awakening of sinners, that in returning to Dundee, and finding myself in the midst of a great spiritual awakening, I was obliged to make known to both Committees that, while my views regarding missionary work remained unchanged, yet I found that I must for the time remain where I was, and fulfil the work which God was laying upon me with a mighty hand."

CHAPTER II

YEARS OF PENTECOSTAL POWER

Substituting for Robert Murray M'Cheyne

So, instead of heading straight to the mission field, Burns was channelled to St Peter's Church, Dundee, as supply pastor for Rev Robert Murray M'Cheyne, then on a convalescence trip to the Holy Land. This was April 1839. The text of his maiden sermon was Romans 12:1 which aptly summed up his commencing ministry and his life in the mission field that followed.

Now, Robert Murray M'Cheyne was a renowned preacher and Bible expositor, who before his premature death at twenty-nine, had left a deep impression on all Scotland. To stand in his place at the pulpit Sunday after Sunday would be a difficult position to fill by one just out of the cloisters. Indeed, Burns had confessed his utter inadequacy, but being assured that God had called him to the task he was bold as a lion before "the greatest, wisest and wealthiest congregation in Scotland."

"His power as a preacher was felt almost from the beginning. He had a voice of vast compass — unsurpassed by even that of Mr Spurgeon (1834 - 1892) — able to command any audience, however large, in church or street or fields. When the power of the Spirit rested on him there were thunders of Sinai in all their terrors; the still small voice of the Gospel in tenderness; and the fluency of a tongue touched with a live coal from the altar. He felt himself standing between the living and the dead, pressing salvation that would accept no refusal, until multitudes

wept before him in sorrow over discovered sin, or for joy over a discovered Saviour."

Pentecost Descended on His Home Church

"The most authentic proof of his ministry came to him while on a visit home where it might have been expected that a prophet would be without honour. In the Church of Kilsyth on the 23rd July 1839, a great congregation was swayed by his preaching as by the rushing of a mighty wind of Pentecost. This was the beginning of a revival which was to spread over Scotland and beyond the seas." (Edward Band in *Working His Purpose Out*, the History of the English Presbyterian Mission, 1847 - 1947).

Speaking of "that memorable Tuesday July 23rd, 1839 — a morning fixed from all eternity in Jehovah's counsels as an era in the history of redemption," William Burns continues, "I went to the Lord's work with an intense longing for the conversion of souls and the glory of Emmanuel." This was scheduled to be an open air meeting, but as the weather did not permit, the meeting was diverted to a building nearby. Observed Burns in his memoirs, "When I entered the pulpit, I saw before me an immense multitude from the town and neighbourhood filling the seats, stairs, passages and porches, all in their ordinary clothes, and including many of the most abandoned of our population."

The preacher began his message by reading the opening lines of Psalm 102 in the Scots Psalter:

*Her time for favour which was set,
Behold, is now come to an end.*

Linking this "couplet" to "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psalm 110:3) he preached them a classic three point sermon fully applied to his hearers that they were

- I. Willing to be saved by Christ's righteousness alone
- II. Willing to take on His yoke
- III. Willing to bear His cross.

Five Hundred Saved in One Day

In the course of his preaching, Burns referred to an outpouring of the Spirit upon a neighbouring Church well-known to the people of Kilsyth a century ago when rain drops began to fall at the close of the service. When the people began to put on their raincoats the preacher applied the situation to their souls if they had any shelter from the drops of Divine wrath. Using this incident in a bygone Revival, Burns pressed upon his hearers to flee to Christ from the wrath to come as John the Baptist the Jews. He thundered the wrath of God with such power that about five hundred persons were saved in one day.

Burns writes of this Day of Victory, "And just when I was speaking of the occasion and the nature of this wonderful address, I felt my own soul moved in a manner so remarkable that I was led, like Mr Livingstone, to plead with the unconverted before me *instantly* to close with God's offers of mercy, and continued to do so until the power of the Lord's Spirit became so mighty upon their souls as to carry all before it, like the rushing mighty wind of Pentecost!

"During the whole time that I was speaking, the people listened with the most riveted and solemn attention, and with many silent tears and inward groanings of the spirit; but at the last their feelings became too strong for all ordinary restraints, and broke forth simultaneously in weeping and wailing, tears and groans, intermingled with shouts of joy and praise from some of the people of God. The appearance of a great part of the people from the pulpit gave me an awfully vivid picture of the state of the ungodly in the day of Christ's coming to judgment. Some were screaming out in agony; others, and among these strong men, fell to the ground as if they had been dead; and such was the general commotion, that after repeating for some time the most free and urgent invitations of the Lord to sinners (as Isaiah 55, Rev 22:17), I was obliged to give out a psalm, which was soon joined in by a considerable number, our voices being mingled with the mourning groans of many prisoners sighing for

deliverance.' The meeting concluded at 3 pm, having lasted five hours." (Nevertheless, there was no speaking of tongues.)

Two moments in that epochal gathering deeply impressed the preacher's brother, Islay, himself also a pastor: "The one was when, as William steadily warmed to his theme, 'appeal followed appeal in ever-increasing fervour and terrible energy, till at last, as he reached the climax of his argument, and vehemently urged his hearers to fight the battle that they might win the eternal prize, the words, No Cross, no Crown, pealed from his lips, not so much like a sentence of ordinary speech, as a shout in the thick of battle!' The other 'moment of intense and uncontrollable emotion' was when, in 'urging sinners to an immediate closing with Christ in the offers of his grace', Burns used the illustration of a life-boat going to the relief of a doomed vessel. He graphically pictured 'the crouching, trembling throng clinging to the gunwale'; and 'as he saw them still hesitating and wasting in fatal inaction the last moments of opportunity, he cried aloud, as one might do from the summit of a neighbouring headland on the shore, "Are you in? Are you in? Flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you! Now or never!"

Pentecost Reenacted at Dundee

The Pentecostal power that was unleashed upon the Kilsyth Church now spread back to Dundee where Burns was standing in for M'Cheyne. As the people first met at the Mid-week Prayer Meeting, the same power that caused many to repent in tears and groans began to grip the congregation. From that evening onwards, meetings were held everyday for weeks. Sometimes these meetings lasted to the wee hours of the morning.

Meanwhile the holy fires that were first kindled at Kilsyth on that memorable Tuesday, 23rd July 1839 kept burning, which demanded a second visit from the Revivalist. At a Saturday evening service at the end of September a thousand came. On the Lord's Day morning following Burns preached to a crowd estimated at about ten thousand in a tent. This he did again in

the same evening. After this second service in the Tent, Burns felt urged to hold a third meeting in Church at 10 pm. This went on till 3 am, but with many sorrowing hearts needing consolation, the Preacher had to continue in counselling until almost daybreak! "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted... Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:4,6).

Burns preached again that Monday afternoon at which many fellow pastors were present. At the close of the service he called the unconverted to come to the front seats to be further instructed and prayed for. In the awesome presence of the Almighty, many of the convicted cried out aloud in bitter weeping for their sins, and did not leave the church till after midnight. Burns called this prolonged service, without doubt, "the most eminently blessed part of the whole communion season."

Hitherto what spiritual blessings that were experienced in M'Cheyne's Church of St Peter at Dundee were only preliminary showers. With Burns returned from Kilsyth a second time, what had happened at Kilsyth was reenacted by the impulse of the irresistible power of God.

Burns reported the events at Kilsyth to the congregation on a Thursday night when the minds of many were already deeply solemnised by the news that had reached them. A hundred who remained after the service was over, who further sought the mercies of the Lord suddenly felt the power of God descending upon them as they all broke down in tears.

At a similar meeting the next evening there was further melting of the heart. As soon as the vestry door was opened, a vast number of seekers pressed into the hall without let up. It was like a tidal wave sweeping all before it. Tears were streaming down the eyes of many, while some fell to the ground groaning and wailing. From that evening, more meetings were held every day for weeks. The whole town was taken, as it were, by storm.

At the height of the meetings, "Burns found a letter from the magistrates interdicting the preaching in the meadows for Tuesday, which did not surprise me, but led me to meditate

solemnly on that approaching conflict with the world and Satan in which many will probably be called to die for the name of Jesus. O Lord, may Jesus Christ be magnified in me, whither by life or by death!" The reason for meeting in the open (which infringed the law in this case) was that crowds overflowed the church by the thousands. To avoid trouble Burns held services rather in the compound of the churchyard.

And so the revival now sweeping Dundee went on until Robert Murray M'Cheyne returned from his Holy Land trip. The prospect of leaving Dundee, now that his term was up, filled Burns and the people he ministered unto with many mixed feelings. "On Thursday evening, November 13, 39 he wrote, "I met Mr M'Cheyne at his own home at half past six, and had a sweet season of prayer with him before the hour of the evening meeting. We went both into the pulpit; and after he had sung and prayed shortly, I conducted the remaining services, speaking from II Samuel 23:1-5, and concluding at ten. We went to his house together and conversed a considerable time about many things connected with the Word of God, and his and my own plans and property."

During his term of service with M'Cheyne's Church in Dundee in 1839 Burns found time to preach in other Scottish towns like Paisley, Kirkintilloch, Denny, Edinburgh and St Andrews. With M'Cheyne's return the supply pastor's "extra-curriculum" ministry was extended to Perth and Aberdeen.

Pentecost Swept on to Perth

At Perth, he preached with thoughts from Jonathan Edward's famous sermon on "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." The message was doubly charged with Holy Spirit power. The feeling of the hearers became so intense that when one man groaned aloud, "Lord Jesus, come and save me," it triggered off an avalanche of simultaneous wailing. Remembered the preacher himself, "This glorious night seemed to me at the time, and appears from all I have since heard, to have been perhaps the

most wonderful that I have ever seen, with the exception perhaps of the first Tuesday (July 23) at Kilsyth."

Pentecost Resisted at Aberdeen

The results of the Aberdeen campaign were no less than those poured down on Kilsyth, Dundee and Perth. Like John Sung in his heyday, Burns also spoke three times a day, plus an additional hour of counselling and prayer. This pattern usually went on for weeks on end. Not content with speaking in Churches, Burns branched out into open air preaching in the steps of John Wesley, come what may. By casting the Gospel net wider in this manner it brought in the poorest and vilest of the people in that degraded district. From open air preaching he went on to gain entrance into the Barracks where, like the days of John the Baptist, many soldiers received the Lord gladly.

One of John Sung's sayings is, "When the Holy Spirit works, the Evil Spirit also works." Scoffers were not lacking. A caustic account of the meetings was published by the *Aberdeen Herald* which drew the attention of the Aberdeen Presbytery of the Church of Scotland. This resulted in the appointment of a Committee of Inquiry to examine the case. No doubt Burns was attacked in the press for the unusual phenomena that characterised his meetings, of men and women crying aloud and falling down prostrate before the Lord, yea, even men in the prime of life --- for their sins. (In the history of Revivals, what happened at the Burns meetings were repeated in the revival meetings conducted by China's lady revivalist, Miss Doru Yu Tzi Tu in the early years of this century.) This phenomenon was related to me specially by my Mother. The same is recorded by Edward Band in the *History of the English Presbyterian Mission* (1847 - 1947). Let it be observed again, there were no speaking of tongues. The Committee's fair report was favourably received by the Aberdeen Presbytery which completely exonerated him and heartily commended him for his good work at Aberdeen and all Scotland. Pure gold beams brighter passing through fire.

Burns Lived by Faith

As to his living, he was accosted by one who asked him point blank, "How are you supported?" Burns straightly answered he never needed to ask a penny from anyone. If he wanted to know further, the preacher said he had just received an anonymous gift of ten pounds. This being a great sum in those days, it confounded the unregenerate. Islay, his preacher brother testified, "It may be right to state here once for all, that from the time of his leaving Dundee until his departure for China, he relied wholly on such support as was spontaneously sent to him by those who desired to further his special work. The result was that while his own immediate wants were amply supplied, he seldom lacked sufficient also to contribute liberally in behalf of Christ's cause and Christ's poor." Burns himself recorded in his journal, "O Lord, deliver me from covetousness, and enable me with overflowing gratitude and joy to give all that I don't require to promote the extension of thy blessed kingdom in this poor ruined world."

Ever Ready

Space will not permit us to tell the story of his further exploits in Newcastle, North England, his standing in for Rev A Moody Stuart of Edinburgh where he taught a Greek class while doing the work of both pastor and evangelist, for according to his family motto, he was ever ready to do whatever needed and answer any call that came to him. While in Edinburgh he was called also to Leith. This tribute was paid to Burns: "He was a man who crowded the work of years into months — of months into weeks — of weeks into days. The work of a lifetime was compressed into this single winter in Edinburgh."

Burn's Stand With the Faithful Secessionists

In the midst of the spiritual revolution came a revolution of another kind which we may call ecclesiastic. In May 1843 the

long standing tension in the Church of Scotland came to a head by what is called the Disruption (or Separation) that led to the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. Burns, who stood always for the truth, such as for Protestantism against Romanism, for what is called fundamentalism today against modernism and liberalism, joined in the march for the Free Church. In today's circumstances he would be on the side of the International Council of Christian Churches, a 20th Century Reformation Movement against the Ecumenism of the World Council of Churches. Out of a total of 1,203 ministers, 473 ministers joined the Free Church, surrendering churches, manses, livings and stipends "for conscience's sake." In the spirit of Martin Luther they could sing above the battle strife:

*That word above all earthly powers —
No thanks to them — abideh;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Thru' Him who with us sideth
Let goods and kindreds go,
This mortal life also
The devil they may kill
God's truth abideh still
His kingdom is forever.*

From Revivalism to Evangelism

With the trauma of the Disruption seizing the Churches, the times of revival suddenly tapered off. This led Burns to help out in the New College as a teacher of Hebrew. From this temporary assignment he was drawn away to Ireland where he witnessed in the public square of Dublin to the Roman Catholics. Here he faced fierce opposition in his clothes being torn and his "soap-box" chair being broken. The mob would try to drown out his message by loud and long-continued booing, but he remained calm to the last, bearing with a radiant joy insomuch that some of the persecutors had to admit, "He is a good man; we cannot make him angry." But so-called Protestant ministers today will no more witness against the dark superstitions of Rome. Rather,

they will seek Rome's blessing under the guise of "brotherly love." William Burns, no less than John Knox, is a son of the Reformation.

From Ireland to Canada

From Ireland, Burns was called to Canada. There he found friends among the converted soldiers he had previously won in the Barracks in Scotland. During his two-year ministry in Canada he preached to the troops in Montreal, he preached to the Roman Catholics in the open air at the *Place d'Armes* in front of the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Here his fluent French came in handy, yea, even his Gaelic, which delighted the Scottish Highland settlers. He spoke to Blacks, Red Indians and to students for the Presbyterian ministry. Among the students was one George Leslie MacKay, who having heard the call from Burn's preaching, became the first missionary of the Canadian Presbyterians to enter Formosa (Taiwan) 1871. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

If you read the mighty works of MacKay as pioneer Canadian Presbyterian missionary to Taiwan, you will sing with Burns, "He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:6).

CHAPTER III

YEARS OF TEARFUL SOWING

*O what blessed thought is this
That God led His children on,
Through the Sea and Wilderness,
He went with them all along.*

*God still leads His children on
Through this dark world here below.
He who gladly gave His Son,
Shall He not more gifts bestow?*

*Sometimes He shows all the way,
As He showed Moses the Land.
Sometimes He guides day by day,
As when they sat at Jordan.*

*There're times He cuts short our plans,
Once and twice He hindered Paul.
Not to Asia or Northern Lands,
God had a greater plan overall...*

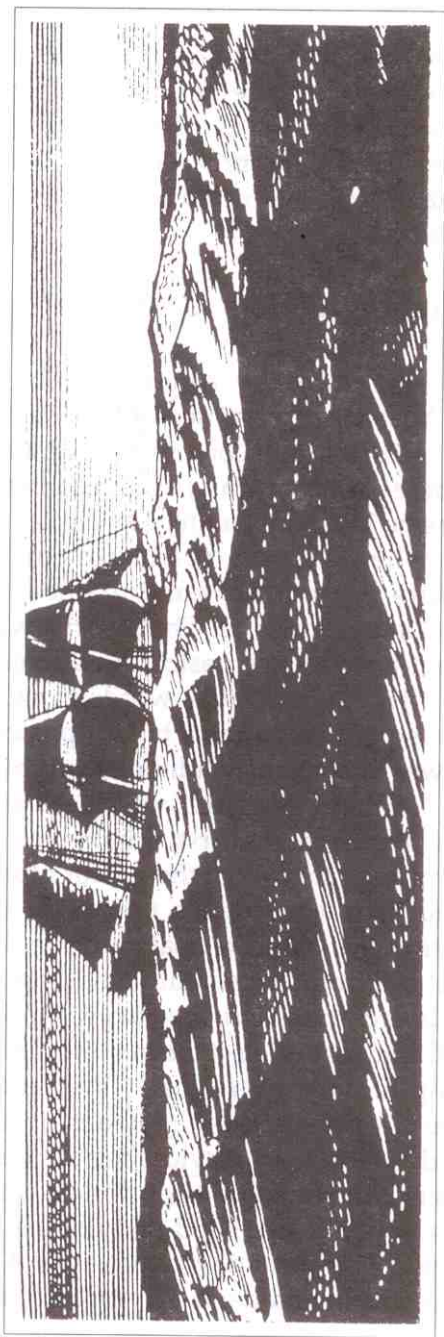
It was noted at the outset how William Burns had vowed to be a foreign missionary while in the University. Then came openings for temporary assignment to New Brunswick, and later India. But God had a higher plan which led him through standing in for Robert Murray M'Cheyne to a Revival ministry all

over Scotland, Northern England, Ireland, and Canada which lasted eight years. Nor was it for Paul to determine his steps in his missionary journeys. There he was making plans to go to Asia, and then to Bithynia, but the Lord pointed the way rather to Troas. From Troas he received the Macedonian call whereupon he made "*trus*" (which means "straight" in Malay) for the continent of Europe.

Marching Orders to China at Last

Without going into the times of anxious waiting in decisions by the Missions Committee of the Presbyterian Church in England, the call from the Lord to foreign missions came to Burns a second time. A new turn of events confirmed the burden upon his heart, as he looked resolutely to China. When asked by the presbyters when he was ready to go, Burns replied, "Tomorrow." Sure enough he was ordained the next day a roving ambassador of Christ to China. He was ordained an evangelist and not a stationary pastor to administer sacraments, as he so desired. He quoted Paul's words in I Corinthians 1:17, "For Christ sent me not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel..." This ordination was auspiciously administered by the Presbytery of New Castle, Northern England, which 40 years before had ordained Robert Morrison the first missionary to China, 1807. Inasmuch as Burns was always on the go, for often he would say, "I must run" and take leave of his friends in the middle of a happy conversation, he found a boat under a favourable wind that forthwith set sail from Portsmouth for Hong Kong.

While on board the *Mary Bannatyne* he began to apply himself to the Cantonese dialect, using the Chinese Bible and dictionary compiled by Morrison. But heavy seas often grounded him to his private cabin, a luxury in those days. His love for souls led him to hold services for the crew. One young man of seventeen, the son of a widow who was witnessed to whether he was ready to see God should the Lord take him, seemed attentive. The next day, August 5, 4.30 am Thomas McLeod, for that was his name, fell overboard and disappeared



William Burns, by Sailboat to China

beneath the waves. They tried to rescue him but all in vain as it was dark and raining, and the wind contrary.

Burns records further, "On August 24, it blew almost a hurricane from the northwest. I was standing on the poop when a lofty wave broke on the vessel. By its force and the rolling of the vessel I was lifted from the deck, but having a firm hold I was mercifully preserved. My watch was filled with salt water, and the chain snapped. How in a moment might the pulse of life have been arrested!" This is one kind of hazard which Paul denotes "perils of the sea" missionaries today are generally exempt, who sail rather over air oceans in 747s.

In "perils of the sea," Burns who took over five months via the Cape of Good Hope (the Suez Canal was not opened till 1869) finally arrived in Hong Kong, 15th November 1847, but not without further hazards. "When we were close to the coast of Luzon, a large island belonging to the Spaniards, in which Manila is the chief port, it began to blow a gale, which continued to increase during the whole of Sabbath, and since this morning has been so severe that some part of the main mast has been blown away, and until this moment (8.30 am) we are running under bare poles, that is, unable to carry the smallest sail, at the mercy of the winds and waves, or more truly at the mercy of that living God 'who bringeth the wind out of his treasures.'

*They that go down to the sea in ships,
That do business in great waters;
These see the works of the Lord,
And His wonders in the deep. (Psalm 107:23)*

Hong Kong

Burns' glowing desire to be a missionary evangelist, as expressed in his own words is: "The longing of my heart would be to go once all round the world before I die, and preach one gospel invitation in the ear of every creature." So, we can see him busily engaged in the Father's business the very moment he landed in the British Colony. As the Presbyterian minister

appointed to Hong Kong for the Western community had not arrived, he readily stepped into his shoes when requested to preach every Lord's Day.

Although he was given a comfortable place to stay in the home of a Mr and Mrs Powers, Burns hastened to rent a house in the Chinese quarters in order to expedite learning the Chinese language in the Cantonese dialect. He employed a personal tutor at the recommendation of Dr Gutzlaff who gave him lessons conveniently at close quarters. With spare rooms in his two storeyed house, he started a Christian day school with about 15 students, three of whom boarded with him. In this manner, he accelerated his learning process by being obliged to speak and hear Chinese and no other language day and night. This is what modern pedagogy calls the "immersion" method.

After fourteen months of immersing in the language study Burns felt confident enough to launch out into the mainland. Across the narrow strip of water which is Hong Kong Harbour, there lies Kowloon with villages and towns further inland teeming with people. Now, only five ports --- Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai were opened to foreign trade and residence, but restrictions were placed on missionaries that they keep within limits. Realising these restrictions Burns wrote to his mother, "You desired that three doors might be opened for me --- the door of utterance into the language; the door of access into the country of China; 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 action that the other two doors may be opened also."

Burns was a man of constant prayer backed by action! He groaned that China was not only a forbidden land to foreigners, but a land of idols, a land without Sabbath, and a land without a Bible. Moreover it was infested with robbers and officials were suspicious, so to enter this land of darkness was no happy undertaking. Trusting in the Lord, Burns made a short exploratory trip. With a pleasant demeanour and good spoken Cantonese he received to his surprise a warm welcome.

Canton (Guangzhou)

In a second sortie made in April 1849 from a town about 85 miles from Hong Kong he wrote, "Since coming back I have visited four villages of 1,000 to 1,500 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 thus speak, 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! ... In other days it has been my privilege to enter into the labours of others, and it may be here I am to labour where others are to reap."

On a third occasion of his Gospel "safari" however, he met with much opposition. So, after sleeping nine successive nights on his little sampan boat, going from place to place and not being permitted to lodge on shore, Burns withdrew to his Hong Kong base to concentrate on his language study.

On a fourth tour inland from Hong Kong Burns encountered more resistance than previously. This time he was robbed of all his belongings except the shirt on his back. Despite all these setbacks, Burns now with his fluent Cantonese, persisted to evangelise Canton itself. He managed to get hold of the expiring lease of a fellow-missionary about to return to Scotland. But the door soon closed, for the lease expired and he was notified to quit. Meanwhile, he received news of a wide open door in Amoy, which the Home Committee favoured as a permanent place of work. In June 1851 Burns sailed out of Canton by river boat to Hong Kong and from Hong Kong to Amoy, 400 miles to the north.

**MAP
OF
EAST
ASIA**



Amoy (Xiamen)

Writing home from Amoy on July 15, Burns said, "I have found a very kind Christian welcome among the missionary brethren, English and American, here, and my expectations are more than exceeded in all I have seen as yet of Amoy as a place and as a missionary station... and I am very much to my mind lodged in the middle of the Chinese population, in a little room connected with the school which was made over to Dr Young by an American missionary on his removal a year ago. Thus settled down amid Chinese voices, and with a Christian native servant... and a Chinese teacher who comes daily, I am endeavouring to exchange my Cantonese for the Amoy Chinese. To speak this new dialect publicly and well may require a good deal of time; but already I can make myself easily understood about common things, and am able to follow a good deal of what I hear in Chinese (Hokkien) preaching..."

By Feb 7, 1852, he could report, "I am now engaged a good deal in the work of spreading the gospel among this people, being in the gracious arrangements of God's providence favoured with the cooperation of professing Christians, both indoors and in the open air. One of those baptised since I came here by the American missionaries aids me regularly, and others from time to time. We have meetings in the chapel of Tai-Hang where Dr Young resides, but get greater numbers in the open air... During this week I also went to the neighbouring country among the villages and preaching the Word with my companions...in six different villages. The work increases in interest and hopefulness. "Thy Kingdom come!"

The next report reads, "On Tuesday the 24th February I again set out to visit some villages on the island of Amoy and returned in much mercy on Tuesday the 22nd March being absent seven nights... We had large audiences everywhere. We generally addressed five or six meetings in the course of the day, and in all must have known something of the truth to at least two or three thousand people... The people were everywhere friendly and attentive. We distributed a large number of tracts and

handbill copies of the Ten Commandments. May the seed of the Word sown spring and bear fruit to the glory of God and the salvation of souls!"

The need of labourers for this vast harvest field was so great that Burns offered up one year of his salary, 250 pounds for the furtherance of the work. Not a year's tithe but a year's full salary! Like Mary's pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly (John 12:3). "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the world there shall also this...be told for a memorial of her (him)" (Matthew 26:1-3).

Revival at Peh-Chuia

Accompanied by two Chinese Christians, one a teacher and the other a former fortune-teller, Burns had spent two busy months preaching in the market place at Peh-chuia and in the surrounding villages. Everywhere they were well received and their message heard with serious attention; a few individuals were especially interested. While Burns returned to Amoy, his two helpers continued to instruct the people whom they gathered together every night in a hired hall. On revisiting Peh-Chuia, Burns found about twenty persons, including women and children, who declared themselves on the side of the Gospel. Among these were two whole families of six members each. The story can best be told by some quotations from Burns's letters:

"The eldest son in one of these families, a promising youth of twenty, Lam-san by name, early showed much decision, having, on the birthday of 'the god of the furnace', taken his god and put it in the fire. The idol having been but in part consumed, his mother discovered among the ashes a part of its head, and father and mother together beat their son severely. But some of the other Peh-chuia inquirers having gone to comfort the young man and reason with his parents, their views underwent so sudden and entire a change, that in a day or two afterwards, they, with their four sons, brought out all their idols and ancestral tablets, and publicly destroyed them in the view of the people.

"The other family is that of a respectable cloth-dealer. They have passed through remarkable trials which seem to have prepared them for receiving the Gospel on its first announcement, having twice lost all their property by robbers. On the second of these occasions having had their house burnt, to cover the robbers' retreat, the whole family were obliged to leap from an upper storey and yet escaped unhurt. They are a very interesting family, and have in one point shown more decision than I have ever before seen in China, having (while yet only inquirers) shut their shop on the last eight Sabbaths, even although two of these Sabbaths were market days.

"The family adjoining our house is literally divided — two against three, and three against two. The elder brother and his wife oppose — they live by making paper images used in idolatrous processions, for burying the dead, etc.; the mother, the second son, with the youngest, who is a mere boy, are on the side of the Gospel. The second son formerly made images with his elder brother, but has now given up his trade, and has begun a general business in one half of the shop which they have in common. It is curious to notice that on the Lord's day the younger brother's side of the shop is closed, while the elder brother's side remains open."

A man of literary talents, Burns' contribution to the Chinese Church is augmented by his revising and enlarging the Amoy Hymnal, himself translating several psalms and hymns. A bigger and more valuable task was his translation of Pilgrim's Progress which was acclaimed the best translation done by a foreigner. In order to choose suitable Chinese names for the various Bunyan characters, Burns went to the hilly graveyards around Amoy to scan the tombstones for appropriate terms! As Burns carried his Bible wherever he went he soon became to be called "Man of the Book." Burns was a favourite in Amoy. During the coolie riots, he was the only European to appear on the streets. A British soldier would not be safe with his bayonet, but the missionary walked about unmolested with the Bible under his arm! Thy Word was not only a lamp and a light, but a shield to His servant.

**“THE
MAN
WITH
THE
BOOK”**



William Chalmers
Burns, M.A.
First Pioneer of
English Presbyterian
Mission to China,
1815–1868.

Furlough

A close friend to Burns was Dr Young, the mission doctor who came before Burns from Hong Kong to Amoy. The sudden death of Mrs Young and the subsequent illness of the over-grieved husband necessitated the return to England with their two children. As Burns had already spent eight years in China without furlough, he agreed to accompany them on their journey home. A Chinese nurse, Boo-a converted by Dr Young went along to care for the children. Being the first Chinese woman to appear in Scotland, she aroused great interest with the people back home — a sure asset for the cause of Missions.

While back in the old country Burns received a letter from the little Church at Peh-Chuia. It read as follows:

'Given to be inspected by Mr Burns and all the disciples.

'We, who have received the grace of Jesus Christ, send a letter to pastor William Burns. We wish that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ may give to all the holy disciples in the Church grace and peace. Now we wish you to know that you are to pray to God for us; for you came to our market town, and unfolded the gracious command of God, causing us to obtain the grace of God. Now, as we have a number of things to say, we must send this communication. We wish you deeply to thank God for us, that in the seventh month and thirteenth day, pastor Johnston established a free school here; there are twelve attending it. Formerly, in the third month, a man, whose name is *Chun-sim*, belonging to the village of *Chieng-choan*, heard you preaching in the village of *Hui-tsau*. Many thanks to the Holy Spirit who opened his blinded heart, so that in the seventh month he sent a communication to the church at Amoy, praying the brethren to go to the village. They went and spoke for several days, and all the villagers with delighted heart listened. Also in the town of *Chioh-bey*, the Holy Spirit is powerfully working; the people generally desire to hear the gospel. The brethren and missionaries have gone together several times; and now, in the village of *Ka-lang*, there are two men, *Ch'eng-soan* and *Sui-mui*, who are joining heart with the brethren in prayer.

'Teacher! we, in this place, with united heart, pray, and bitterly (earnestly) beg of God to give you a level plain (prosperous journey) to go home, and beg of God again to give you a level plain (good journey) quickly to come. Teacher! you know that our faith is thin (weak) and in danger. Many thanks to our Lord and God, who defends us as the apple of the eye. Teacher! from the time that we parted with you in the seventh month, we have been meditating on our Lord Jesus' love to sinners, in giving up His life for them; also thinking of your benevolence and good conduct, your faith in the Lord, and compassion for us. We have heard the gospel but a few months; our faith is not yet firm. Teacher! you know that we are like sheep that have lost their shepherd, or an infant that has lost its milk. Many thanks to the Holy Spirit, our Lord, morning and evening, comforts our hearts [and gives us] peace. And in the seventh month, the 24th day, the brethren with united heart prayed, and shedding tears, bitterly begged of God again to send a number of pastors, quickly to come, again to teach the gospel. We wish that God our Father may grant this prayer, which is exactly that which the heart desires.'

The prayer of the infant Hokkien Church was speedily answered, for the premature death of Dr Young cleared the way. However, when Burns returned to China he did not go back to Amoy, but headed straight on to Shanghai, for he had a new mission to carry out, viz, speaking to the leaders of the Taiping Rebellion in Nanking.

Shanghai and Nanking

During the years there fomented in South China a most devastating uprising. It began as a religious reformation, became a political movement and ended as a military rebellion which nearly overthrew the Manchu dynasty.

The leader of this Taiping Rebellion was Hung Hsiu-chuan, a Hakka. He read a Christian tract by Liang A-fa, the assistant to Robert Morrison, first missionary to China. Adopting the Christian principles he found therein, he proclaimed the establishment of a Kingdom of Heaven on earth which he called

the Great Peace Heavenly Kingdom (太平天国). It first began as a worshipper of Shang-Ti (God) movement and developed into an iconoclastic crusade which struck at the practices of ancestor worship and every form of idolatry. It urged the observance of the Ten Commandments and adopted some forms of Christian worship. Out of these religious emphases was born a military power that now threatened the Manchu regime.

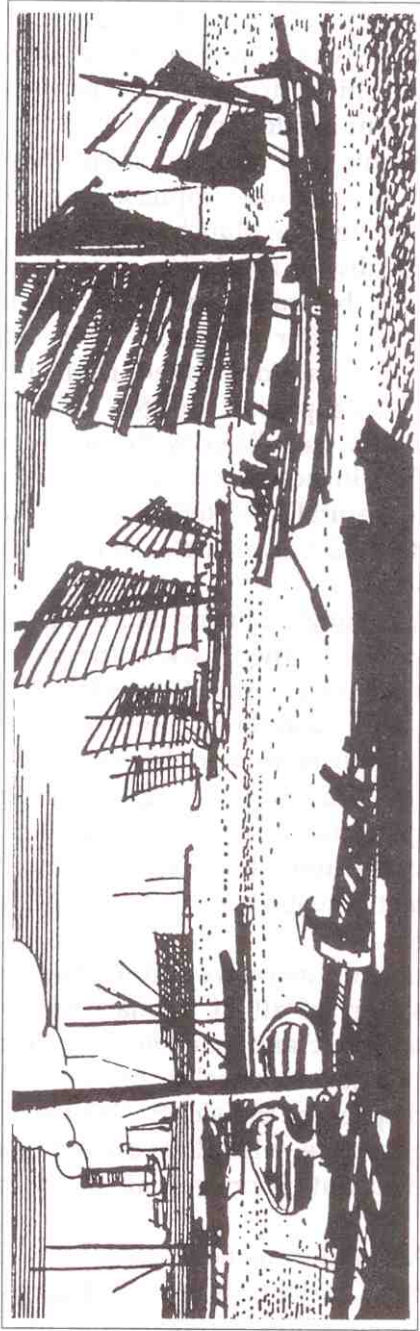
Inspired by the divine revelation supposedly received by Hung and encouraged by initial successes, the fanatical rebels swept through province after province. They opposed opium, wine and prostitution and destroyed idols in the temples. Incidentally Amoy was captured on 18th of May, 1853 by the local supporters of the Rebellion without bloodshed, as the Manchus had all fled in advance. Now, instead of attacking Peking the Manchu capital the Rebels settled down to make Nanking their seat of Government. That is why Burns was heading for Nanking.

Reporting from Shanghai Burns told of his attempt to reach Nanking by boat, but was turned back in the providence of God. Instead of communicating the Gospel with the Taiping authorities, Burns had wonderful opportunities distributing tracts to the seas of people he met on the way.

For six months Burns was engaged in a water-borne evangelism, being employed to circulate the Scriptures in connection with the **Million Testament Scheme**. It was in this itineration that he met Hudson Taylor, later founder of the China Inland Mission (1865).

As both Burns and Taylor were consumed by one passion, viz., the evangelisation of all of China, they became bosom friends. A spiritual giant and one-and-half decades senior to Taylor, Burns was Taylor's counsellor or spiritual uncle, so the younger man could speak of the elder: "William Burns is better for me than a college course, with all its advantages because right here in China is lived out before me all that I long to be as a missionary."

Says Eric J. Alexander in the *Foreword* to "China's Man of the Book" by Agnes Clarke, "By any standard, Burns was a remarkable man, and his life a remarkable life. But his true



The Yangtse River, near Shanghai

significance lies in what Hudson Taylor saw: the quality of his consecration, his zeal for God, and the steadfastness of his devotion, both in times of amazing blessing, and in days of deep discouragement. We have much to learn from him today. Our need is to see his like multiplied among us."

Swatow (Santou)

Now the Shanghai field was comparatively well-served by an increasing influx of missionaries. When Captain Bowers of the ship *Geelong*, a devout Christian, mentioned to Burns and Taylor at a chance meeting of an untouched field in Swatow, a burgeoning port in the South between Canton and Amoy, and offered them free passage, the Gospel tandem took it to be a new call from the Lord. Indeed, it was God speaking through Bowers as events later showed.

Though lodging among the Chinese was hard to get, to their great joy they found one the second day after reaching Swatow March 1856. Reporting on what they had seen Burns says, "Mr Taylor and myself came here quite undecided whether we should be able to attempt more than simply to make a running visit for the purpose of Scripture and tract distribution to the open parts of the country; but now that we see more fully the importance of this region as a vast and unoccupied scene for missionary labour, we are anxious, before going further, to prepare ourselves for the purpose of teaching the people orally by acquiring some knowledge of their dialect. This is comparatively easy work in my case, the dialect spoken here being. . . very similar to that spoken in Amoy."

Though Taylor had to return to Shanghai after four months with the view of bringing with him his medical instruments, but did not return, Burns stuck on his job to the very end. The difficulties he encountered in the Swatow field equalled those he went through in Canton. Here is his fair description of the depravity of the Teochew people which we heard from our Grandfather in our childhood. Burns wrote: "The people in this district are, I think, if possible, more blind and hardened in idolatry and sin than in any place (if we except Canton) where I

have formerly laboured. Although society presents here the usual features of Chinese civilization, it is coupled with a barbarity in certain circumstances which I have seen or heard of nowhere else in China. The fishermen, boatmen, and people working in the fields, pursue their work in summer in a state of savage nudity; and within the last twenty years I am credibly informed, persons taken prisoners in the clan feuds have not only been cut to pieces, but their hearts boiled and eaten by their enemies. Such is heathenism in this part of civilized China. The ravages of opium we meet with here on every hand, and the deterioration of the morals of the people generally I cannot but ascribe, in great part, to the use of this ensnaring and destructive drug. When will measures be taken by those in power to lay an arrest on the opium traffic, which is inflicting such an indescribable injury on this people..? How blinded by the love of money are they who seek to enrich themselves by the gains of such a traffic!

"In a postscript Burns adds: 'About 2 o'clock am, or past midnight, July 18th, 1856. We have just been visited by robbers, who have taken all but the clothes we wear, without however doing us any injury. This is a new call to pity, and to pray for this poor people, sunk so low in darkness and sin...'"

Burdened all the more for the salvation of our ancestors in the Swatow district, Burns pressed on with two Chinese assistants into the prohibited interior. They came to a village called Tang-leng where they found two Teochew clansmen who were converted by American Baptists in Siam (Thailand). They were delighted, and taking courage they came to within five or six miles of Chaon-chow-foo, where was the home of my maternal great grandfather, Tan Khai Lin (or Tan Su-Chuan). But news of a foreigner, taking cover in a river boat (for that was how Burns travelled) reached the authorities. In no time he found himself held by heavy hands of the local police and taken to the City with all his preaching materials and books.

The same night he was examined with his two assistants publicly by the magistrate who required him to go down on his knees as was the practice in Imperial China. But William Burns respectfully refused, offering to go down only on one knee as he

would to his British sovereign, Queen Victoria. Taken aback the magistrate yielded to his request, "for them that honour me, I will honour" (I Samuel 2:30).

Back in Canton

The magistrate was kindly affectioned to the servant of the Most High God and was minded to release Burns on security. As it was required by Treaty that every foreigner arrested be handed over to the consul of his county, the magistrate had him sent by "royal" river-boat to Canton, the provincial capital. And what a one-month luxury trip it was at the expense of the Manchu Emperor! Burns wrote: "I was provided with a servant, and with whatever food I wished, at the expense of the government..." After contact was made with the British Consulate in Canton, the Scots missionary went off scot free! There's a higher hand guiding and guarding every Christian which in theological language is called "particular providence."

It was after his release that Burns found out the reason why Hudson Taylor did not return to Swatow, as he had planned. "My friend and former fellow labourer here, Mr J H Taylor, has just been married at Ningpo to a daughter of a late missionary, Mr Samuel Dyer."

Back in Swatow

No sooner was Burns set free than Swatow found him back on its parched soil again. He was distressed to learn of the two Chinese assistants still under imprisonment and subjected to cruel treatment, but rejoiced in their firm stand for the Lord. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Upon this his glorious return to Swatow, Burns found a hero's welcome at the Treaty Port. "Enjoying favour in the sight of rich and poor, the rulers and the ruled, he was able at last to secure a permanent headquarters for the English Presbyterian Mission. Opening a clinic with the help of a Wesleyan doctor, Burns could now practise "medical evangelism" on forty or fifty patients who came for treatment twice a week.

This medical ministry which was most effective in soul winning led to the founding of the famous Swatow Mission Hospital in 1863. It was at the Swatow Mission Hospital that my father went through five years training to qualify as a doctor.

Back in Amoy

As Burns' mission was to evangelise China to the widest possible extent, seeing that he had established the Gospel base firmly in Swatow for the E.P. Mission, Burns left the Teochew field to revisit Amoy his other station in October 1858. He handed the work to Rev George Smith his successor at whose hand my maternal great grandfather found his Saviour. Did either Burns or Smith know they were planting the mustard seed to sprout into the Tree of the Bible Presbyterian Churches in Southeast Asia, yea, even unto the uttermost part of the earth? "For who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10).

On to Foochow (Fuzhou)

After a brief visit to Peh-chuia in the Amoy field, and an attempt at opening another station at Chang-chow, Burns said to his colleagues, "I must run" when he met Captain Bowers again in October 1859. The Captain's offer of a free passage to Foochow, capital of Fukien Province, landed him happily in a new sphere of Gospel work.

At Foochow he switched from Hokkien to the Foochow dialect with less difficulty than from Cantonese to Hokkien. As in Amoy he did a more permanent work through the pen by preparing a colloquial hymnbook for the new converts. With a true catholic spirit he gave a helping hand to the American Methodist missionaries in evangelistic outreaches. His work in Foochow leaves a sweet memory to this day.

Back in Amoy Again

From Foochow Burns paid a last visit to Amoy in 1861 where he had cultivated as much as his Swatow field from which have been borne most far reaching results. From Amoy he now learned of persecutions that had lately fallen on his flock, the believers of Pechuia being the hardest hit. The Christians' cattle were robbed, their fields of rice and sugar cane plundered, their fruit trees cut down and their use of the village well deprived. Although the matter was settled with the Chinese authorities by intervention of the British consul, Burns felt he must bring the matter before the British Ambassador in the Chinese capital Peking. Accordingly he took leave of the brethren and reached Peking in October 1863.

On to Peking (Beijing)

After registering the complaints of persecuted Hokkien Christians with the British Ambassador, Sir Frederick Bruce, Burns settled down in a small house with a self-contained court which was rented at 2 shillings and 6 pence per month. Here he lived for four years.

He continued in the work of an evangelist, working with the four Missions now established in the capital. He was the first foreigner to preach in the streets. He took up his pen again and translated the *Pilgrim's Progress* into Mandarin and produced a Commentary on the Psalms also in the Mandarin (pai hua) dialect. "While engaged constantly in these literary enterprises Mr Burns never intermitted preaching when not physically incapacitated for it. He preached often at the LMS (London Missionary Society) hospital chapel which was a stone's throw from his residence. He helped out in a number of other chapels British or American in the true catholic spirit. This was a re-enactment of his days in Foochow.

He went on gospel tour at least on four occasions in conjunction with LMS in a two-hundred mile radius. He was on the go, without let up, all the time. But with more missionaries



Northern Chinese Faces

rubbing shoulders in the Chinese capital, he felt again that urge to go forth to some new field...

*To the hardest of places He calls me to go,
Not thinking of comfort or ease;
The world may pronounce me a dreamer, a fool —
Enough if the Master I please.*

Chorus:

*To the regions beyond,
I must go, I must go,
Till the world, all the world,
His salvation shall know.*

*O ye that are spending your leisure and powers
In pleasures so foolish and fond,
Awake from your selfishness, folly, and sin
And go to the regions beyond.*

*There are other lost sheep that the Master must bring,
And to them must the message be told.
He sends me to gather them out of all lands
And welcome them back to His fold.*

CHAPTER IV

YEAR OF VICTORY AND GLORY

On to Newchwang

In the autumn of 1867, twenty years after he first set foot on China, William Burns made an exploratory trip to Tientsin, the Port of Peking. As he stood on the seashore there lay Shantung to the south and Manchuria to the north. Always striving with the Apostle Paul not to build on another man's foundation but "to preach the Gospel not where Christ was named" (Romans 15:20) he would go rather to Newchwang (called Yingkow today) on the border of Manchuria. The captain of a Chinese junk in which he went would take no money from him for the passage. Realising he was a messenger of God going on a sacred mission to do good the shipmaster felt it was his blessing to refrain from charging the holy man. Arriving in Newchwang Burns and his Chinese assistant went to look for a house. They found one in the outskirts. Soon after settling down Burns began to hold daily public and private services. On Sundays Burns would preach at the English worship at the British Consolate.

Soon after arrival Burns wrote to Douglas Carstairs his successor in Amoy as George Smith was in Swatow, "It seems to me that no place more suitable could be recommended to the Irish Presbyteries than Newchwang and Manchuria beyond, a vast open and unoccupied field, with a fine climate, and a population comparatively well off in a worldly point of view. In

writing home, I have already made this suggestion, and I hope that on consideration you will see your way to second my proposal. If the Irish were here, would this not be a fine place to come to from the south for a change of air? ... Romish priests are found here and there, but the only representative of the Protestant churches is my solitary self."

Alas, in the severity of the northern winter Burns caught a cold. To his mother he wrote on January 15, 1868: 'At the end of last year I got a severe chill which has not yet left the system, producing chilliness and fever every night, and for the last two nights this has been followed by perspiration, which rapidly diminishes the strength. Unless it should please God to rebuke the disease, it is evident what the end must soon be, and I write these lines beforehand to say that I am happy, and ready through the abounding grace of God either to live or to die. May the God of all consolation comfort you when the tidings of my decease shall reach you, and through the redeeming blood of Jesus may we meet with joy before the throne above!'

For weeks and months he lay in helpless weakness. Though he knew the end was coming he was resigned to it. Still in good cheer, he made arrangements for the support of his assistant Wang, until some other missionary arrived to take his place. Did he not follow our Saviour's example in arranging support for Mary his mother?

A friend who visited him in the closing hours described the deathbed scene:

'The little room in which he died had but few comforts, certainly no luxuries. The form on which he slept, a table, two chairs, two bookcases and an open-grate foreign stove made up all the furniture. The light came into the room through a large paper window. The assistant sat at his feet weeping, now and then raising his eyes upward in silent prayer, and the servant on one side watching with tenderness his wants. These two simple minded natives, judging from their life and sayings since, must have profited by his last injunctions. And so after the years of toil he passed away into the other world, 'God,' he said, 'will carry on the good work... Ah! no, I have no fears for that'.

God answered the prayer of his intrepid servant by sending the first Irish Presbyterian missionaries to Manchuria May 1, 1869 in the persons of Rev H Waddell and Dr J Hunter. Missionaries from the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland followed suit the following year. These two Missions cooperated in building a strong church in Manchuria, which after 40 years, numbered 16,000 communicants with a Mission staff of 70 Europeans. God honoured His servant's request.

Into Glory

Burns was received into glory on April 4th, 1868. His last words which he uttered with extraordinary power were the doxology, "For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory. Amen."

When the trunk containing his personal belongings was sent home and opened, there were found a few sheets of printed matter, a Chinese and English Bible, an old writing case, one or two small books, a Chinese lantern and the blue flag of the gospel boat. He had given his last cent to the work of the Lord, as he once did a whole year's salary of 250 pounds. He gave every cent to the poor, but how rich is his heavenly account! And like Abel, Burns is still speaking to us today.

*O William Burns! We will not call thee dead,
Though lies thy body in its narrow bed
In far-off China. Though Manchuria keeps
Thy dust, which in the Lord securely sleeps,
Thy spirit lives with Jesus: and where He,
Thy Master dwells, 'tis meet that thou shouldst be.
There is no death in His divine embrace!
There is no life but where they see His face!*

- H. Grattan Guinness

* * *

On a lonely mound on the border of China and Manchuria where icy northern winds blow there lies the grave of God's servant with this tablet, with the following inscription in his own words:

To the Memory
of the
REV. WM. C. BURNS, A.M.,
Missionary to the Chinese
from the
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ENGLAND
Born at Dun, Scotland, April 1st, 1815,
Arrived in China, November 1847.
Died at Port of New-Chwang, April 4th, 1868.
II Corinthians : V Chapter

"Absent in the body, present with the Lord" (II Corinthians 5:8).



William Burns entering glory like Valiant-for-Truth
in Pilgrim's Progress

SERMON BY WILLIAM BURNS

TRUE ZEAL

[In February 1844, Burns visited Perth for ten days, at the earnest request of those who longed to see an ingathering of souls. Besides three services on the Sabbaths, he had a service every evening, as also at 9.15 am, for working people, during their breakfast hour. Prayer for a blessing on the town was followed by a short address to Christians on the way to work acceptably for Christ. Snow was on the ground most of the time, but it did not prevent a large attendance.]

'But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.'
Galatians 4:18

There is nothing more precious than true zeal in the things of God, and nothing, perhaps, which has so many counterfeits. Genuine zeal is simply a soul-absorbing concern for the Lord's glory, and it is thus the highest of all graces: it can only be in lively exercise when love to God is felt, and, indeed, not always then, for it requires a high degree of heart-devotion and self-dedication to put it forth and sustain it. There may easily be a great deal of zeal in a bad cause; so high may that zeal rise, that the true zeal of God's children can scarce keep pace with it. They seldom rival the zeal that will 'compass sea and land to make one proselyte.' There may also be a great deal of bad zeal in good cause. Alas! that this should be, at all times so common in the church of God. True zeal is, then, as rare as it is precious; it is a fruit seldom seen among us. Few men are filled with such a desire after God's glory as Christ had, when he said, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up,' or if they do at times feel

something approaching to it, it soon evaporates, it does not last. And why is this? Why do those, who were once the most zealous in the work of God, begin to fall asleep? Why do those who used to weep tears of sorrow and pity over the unawakened, and who could not let one act, dishonouring to God, pass unreprieved, or at least unmourned, now begin to sit down with careless professors, giving all up in despondency and hopelessness, and even saying in God-dishonouring unbelief, 'We must take things as they are, and leave others to take their own way, and wait God's time?' My dear friends, whoever says *that*, is guilty of treason against the King of kings; and, moreover, whoever *perseveres* in saying that, will bring, ere long, a blight upon his own soul, and it may be, upon all his labours. It is a dangerous thing to cease from the work of seeking to gain others over to the service of our Master; the souls's prosperity is so intimately connected with it, that we cannot neglect it without losing the blessing of God.

On the other hand, if we *are* engaged in a good work, we cannot throw too much energy into it; it is impossible to cast too fervent a heat into genuine heaven-born zeal; for when will our zeal be worthy the followers of the Lord Jesus, who left his throne, and suffered, and bled, and died on this earth, just that he might bring glory to the divine law, and sanctify the Father's name, in the redemption of lost sinners, by the blood of his cross?

'It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.' And were none of you ever thus affected? Some of you *were* zealous in days past. Has it lasted? Examine yourselves as to this, while we mention one or two things which are inseparable from true zeal, and without which it cannot burn with a pure and steady flame.

The first of these, is a *strong spiritual appetite*. A living believer seeks to have an equal relish for all the food which he finds in the Word of God. There is no truth, provided it have Divine sanction, from which he will not extract saving benefit, and life to his soul: the *smallest* parts of God's truth, as we might be apt to call them, have deep attractions in his eyes, and the *plainest* parts of the Word have more charms for him than the

most adorned human compositions. Have you this characteristic of a child of God?

The second thing which we shall mention, is *spiritual activity*. This is the first outward manifestation of the existence of true zeal in the heart, and it springs immediately from the spiritual appetite of which we have spoken.

The want of food incapacitates a man from working; unless his body receive due support, he cannot work either hard or long; and so in the divine life, if a man cease personally to live *on* Christ, he cannot work long for Christ among others. Impossible! He may keep up the appearance of this life long after the reality of it is gone: I believe that some now present can confirm the truth of this by painful experience. Are there not some among you who used to warn your fellow-sinners, and pray with them, and employ every means in your power to lead them to Jesus, speaking to them out of a full heart, and with all the earnestness of love? — but now, your efforts are feeble, and what you say is forced, and only said from sense of duty.

You complain that it does not impress the hearts of those to whom it is addressed. My dear friend, *it does not pierce your own conscience*; and it is only when a deep and powerful impression of the truth abides on a man's own heart that the word has power to convince and to convert others. Sometimes the words spoken, whether of warning, or in commendation of Christ, are like nothing but dry skeletons of skin and bone, without either life or soul in them, and falling cold and powerless on the ear. But when truth is vividly impressed on the speaker's inmost soul, each word seems to have a volume in it, and every remark drops down sweetness and fresh fragrance.

And why should it not be always thus? Is the glory of Christ not what it once was? Are the interests of God's kingdom less dear to you, or is it so far advanced in the world, that you have nothing now to do but to sit still, and look idly on? Is the state of sinners less awful, or their danger less imminent, because they are so many years nearer eternity? No, go forward.' This shows us that men may, and do, sometimes, slink away from self-denying, disagreeable duties, and go to prayer, when they

ought rather to be turning 'the battle to the gate.' You will generally find that these are the times when you will be least able to pray. It were absurd to call true prayer sinful; prayer is our strength, the safeguard of the soul: the Lord the Spirit gives the heart to pray. But let us keep all things in the order which God has laid them, remembering for our encouragement that nothing is ever undertaken for the promotion of the cause of God in which he will refuse to aid us. I would make no exceptions or limitations to this; for I believe that no man, however poor, and weak, and humble, ever did undertake anything with a single heart and eye to God's glory, and according to his will, without finding God in his path, strengthening and supporting him, if not visibly working with and for him.

Believer! can you contradict this assertion? Can you point to the time when you sought, with a sincere and willing heart, to serve and glorify him, and say, that *then* you found him to be a wilderness, or a land of darkness? I know you cannot.

If you desire the continuance of real, solid, spiritual comfort, seek to work diligently for God. You know that mere feeling cannot last long — much of it must necessarily pass away; it lasts for a time, but the mind wears out, and sinks into a cold relapse, and fresh excitement is required to arouse it again. Ah! but that is not like the calm, pure, spiritual feeling, produced by an impression on the will, through the Holy Ghost, elevating the conceptions, purifying the desires, constraining and keeping in subjection the whole heart and mind to the obedience of Christ.

Another mark of zeal, is *implicit, immediate, child-like obedience*. How simple is the obedience of a little child; it does not ask a reason, or form a precise opinion of each step it takes, but readily follows its parent wherever he leads. A calm, unmurmuring obedience is what the Lord seeks from his people, a chastened temper, a renewed will; for such a work in the soul is permanent and abiding, and sends forth a constant flow of holy zeal.

The world will not believe in any real zeal among God's children; the world thinks it is only a natural thing, arising from natural sources, and, therefore, that it will soon wear out and pass off. Alas, that we should give them so much reason to think

so! Beloved friends, look at Paul. Did his zeal wear out? Did it diminish? Did the coldness of the prison chill it? Was it broken under the lash? Was it bound by the chains that lay on his body? Did it suffer shipwreck, when he was three days in the depths of the sea? Did the flame of persecution consume it? Did the roaring of wild beasts terrify him out of his zeal for the cross? No; for Christ was revealed within him, and that was a permanent thing.

As men advance in the divine life, zeal becomes purer; it has less of natural emotion in it, and more of God's grace. And, my dear friends, whenever a Christian begins to languish and fall away, the first flower that the wind of temptation nips, is zeal. Pray, then, for us, and for yourselves, that we may endure, shall I say, for a *little* longer — a few years — or *many* years? No; it is *to the end* that we must endure. This is not the language of our own hearts, the flesh is always crying out, 'Stop now, stop now!' Yes, and that is a very comfortable sound in a man's ears, when he is worn out and weary; ay, and a man might begin to think about obeying it, if another voice did not contradict the lie; if God did not say, 'He that shall endure *to the end*, the same shall be saved.' Alas! brethren, we know too well what decays of zeal are; and now that, in the gracious providence of God, we are permitted again to meet in this place, to labour together for the in-gathering of souls, may it be to act boldly, and to enter in, by the open door of Immanuel's glorious and everlasting righteousness, to obtain the promise of the Father, — the greater Breaker himself going before us, and Jehovah at the head of us. He breaks up the way for all his children, not only to deliver them from the wrath to come, and from a state of condemnation, but going before them also in all that is undertaken for his glory, and in his name. He does a part of all his works on earth by his people, and enables them to overcome all difficulties, and to overthrow them in the name of the Lord. He makes the worm Jacob, a new sharp threshing instrument, by him beating the mountains as chaff. 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.'

Ready

A. C. PALMER, 1845-1882

CHARLES D. TILLMAN, 1861-1943

1. Read-y to suf-fer grief or pain, Read-y to stand the test;
2. Read-y to go, read-y to bear, Read-y to watch and pray;
3. Read-y to speak, read-y to think, Read-y with heart and mind;
4. Read-y to speak, read-y to warn, Read-y o'er souls to yearn;

Read-y to stay at home and send Oth-ers if He sees best.
Read-y to stand a - side and give Till He shall clear the way.
Read-y to stand where He sees fit, Read-y His will to find.
Read-y in life or read-y in death, Read-y for His re - turn.

CHORUS

Read-y to go, read-y to stay, Read-y my place to fill;

Read-y for serv-ice low-ly or great, Read-y to do His will.



A Pilgrim's Song

*"Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather.
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.*

*"Who so beset him round
With dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound,—
His strength the more is;
No lion can him fright,
He'll with a giant fight;
But he will have a right
To be a pilgrim.*

*"Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
Can daunt his spirit;
He knows he at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies fly away,
He'll fear not what men say;
He'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim."*

John

Bunyan

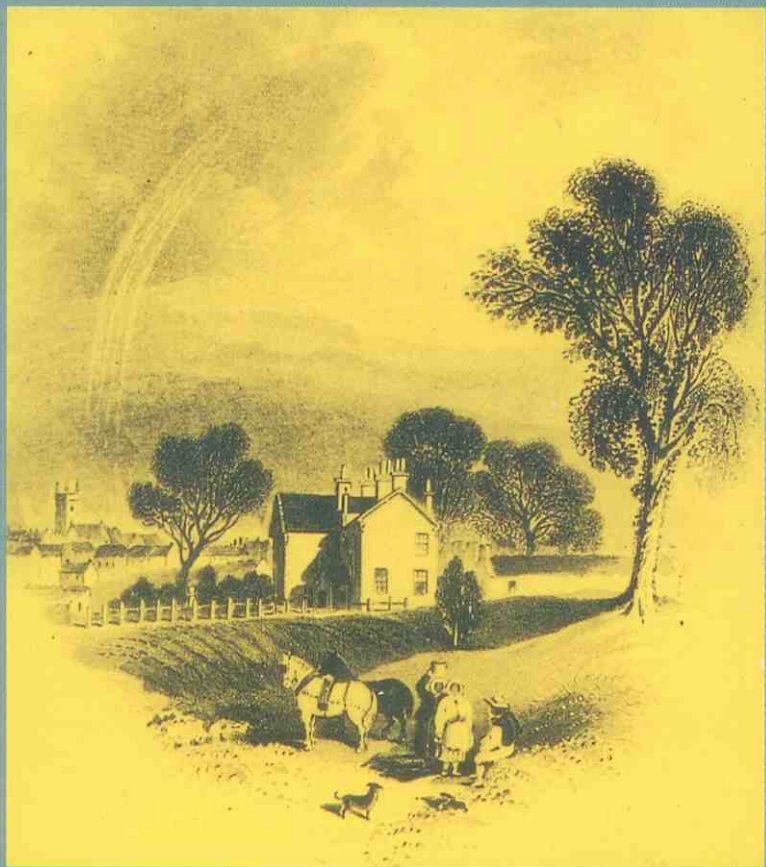


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 - The Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God
 - Prophets of Fire and Water
 - Prophescope on Israel
- A Glimpse of the Life & Works of John Calvin
 - Born Again in the Singapore Pentecost
- Forty Years on the Road to Church Growth
 - Recipes for Living a Happy Life



This is the Manse at Kilsyth, Scotland, where William Burns lived with his parents, brothers and sisters. William's father was pastor of the Kilsyth Church, 12 miles from Glasgow. He hoped his son would one day follow his footsteps and become a pastor.

Like any other country boy, William had no higher ambition than to be a farmer. He loved the countryside, where he would roam with gun to shoot birds or with rod to the riverside to fish. But God had a higher plan for him.

Read the thrilling story of his conversion, and how he became a mighty preacher and revivalist, and first pioneer of the English Presbyterian Mission to China. He founded the Presbyterian Church in Amoy (Xiamen) and Swatow (Santou) in the eighteen fifties. From Amoy and Swatow migrated our grandparents to Singapore and Malaysia, who handed down the Presbyterian faith to leaders of the Bible Presbyterian Church. Hence William Chalmers Burns is rightly called our Grandfather.