

INTRODUCTION

Originally, Batang, West China, was in the province of Kham, Tibet. Before the missionaries arrived, the Chinese of the Manchu Empire had conquered the small town and valley, garrisoned soldiers in Batang and set up officials, including a mayor. Merchants and traders had moved in. The royal family of Batang had either been killed or fled to Lhasa. The monastery had been quite large but the Chinese burned it killing or scattering the lamas and their abbot. In Lhasa the XIIIth Dalai Lama in the line of incarnations of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of compassion and the patron deity of Tibet, still reigned. The Chinese had tried for centuries to rule Tibet but had only been able to hold a limited suzerainty of a yearly tax, which the Tibetan ruling class was delighted to pay to keep the Manchus out of their hair. Nevertheless China has always claimed Tibet as part of theirs but had to continually fight to keep even the small territory of the eastern part of Kham under their rule.

Buddhism entered Tibet several centuries after its beginning in India, but became a real part of Tibet much more than it did in India. Buddhism influenced the missionaries, a few studied it enough to understand some of its complexities and its philosophy. Petrus Rijnhart, Dr. Shelton and Marion Duncan were able to appreciate it enough to be comfortable debating with some of the lamas or the higher ranking Buddhists. Mostly, though, it had little meaning to the missionaries, except to enjoy the festivals and to preach against the status into which it placed the ordinary poor Tibetan.

Another influence upon this mission was that, according to Dr. Susie: China's great and ancient civilization had produced three cults: Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. There is a civilized tolerance of beliefs by the Oriental so that religious and philosophical beliefs are unified "by swallowing a portion of each". That a westerner would find these irreconcilable is thought strange by the Oriental. After all, Taoism is materialism, Buddhism is idealism and Confucianism is essentially an ethical system for organizing society. There are also elements of religious beliefs involving good and evil spirits, good fortune, reverence for the dead, etc. which are of older origin. It is very possible that Christianity will become inter-mingled as a religious faith and an ethical system.

The purpose of this book is not to exhaust a study of either Tibetan Buddhism or the range of history of China and Tibet, but merely to make clear the contact of these missionaries of the early decades of this century with the people and culture of their beloved

Batang Valley and of their intermittent contact with the larger areas of Tibet proper and of China and the history of that time as it affected their lives, their work and the people they were trying to serve. A glimpse of the sweep of history is essential to understand what happened to this tiny mission. They did the best they could and that best was heroic. We badly need such heroes and heroines today.

There were some excellent linguists among these missionaries., the Rijnharts, Dr. Shelton, the Ogdens, Marion Duncan. Dr. Susie wrote, "Thibetan, philologically, belongs to the Turanian family of languages. Its alphabet, adapted from the Sanskrit by Tou-mi-sam-bho-ta. (A. Tom Grunfeld in the Making of Modern Tibet, p. 35, confirms the name with a modern spelling: Thomi Sanibhota. He was sent as a minister to Kashmir by Princess Wen Cheng, to bring back a written script, sometime after 641 AD.) Dr. Susie states he was a noted scholar and statesman, about 623 AD. The (Thibetan) script affords a character simple and easily formed. This contrasts strongly with the cumbrous glyphs of the Chinese." (Rijnhart, p. 36-7.)

Another item of historical importance for this tiny mission: There are two kinds of missionaries in their approach to missionary work. One is the itinerant missionary, the other the builder missionary. The first feels the urgent need to continually go on to new fields, anxious that no one be missed in spreading the Good News of the Word. The other sees the difficulties the new Christians have and feels just as strongly the need to dig down and plant roots to build the Christian community so that new Christians may grow in understanding of the new life and have strength to support each other within the neighborhoods alien to their new Christian life. The Rijnharts and Dr. Shelton were definitely itinerators.

Thanks needs to go first to the Missionary Kids of the Batang Gang, particularly to Harold Ogden, Dorris Shelton Still, John Kenneth Duncan, Duncan MacLeod and William Palmer Hardy; all of whom, except John and Duncan, have not lived to see the finish of this manuscript. They gave much, each in their own way, to keeping alive the Flame of the Fire of the Batang Mission, telling me their story of remembrance. I deeply regret that they did not see the end of this but each contributed to my understanding. Shirley Mae Ogden Lindsey, daughter of Harold Ogden and Yishi Chudren, added to this story the anguish of her separation from her mother and her battle to survive in America's strange culture.

Thanks next to the Disciples of Christ Historical Society under Jim Seale and Peter Morgan and their staff for the use of their materials (letters, documents, and records) and the giving of their time to this manuscript. Thanks to Dr. Howard Short and Dr. Joseph Smith who

read my material and gave me advice. It could not have gotten done otherwise! A word of thanks to my son, Raja David Adams, for final proofreading of the material.

Thanks also to all the other sources who gave their consent to the use of materials - it has been a fascinating treasure hunt to find them! I never found the descendants of the Worhleys, Emersons or Bakers - if any of you see this please contact me! Last of all, thanks to my readers - may you find a Flame and a hero or a heroine!

Note~ Italicized sections are first the authors comments upon the historical material and, secondly, any reports that it seemed wise to differentiate from the rest of the material.

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