

THE REVIVAL IN MANCHURIA

by Thomas Graham

Graham's documentation of a spiritual revival in Manchuria around 1912 under the leadership of Rev. J. Goforth, describing how the revival spirit spread through spontaneous prayer, emotional conversions, and transformative spiritual experiences among believers in the region.

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The Revival in Manchuria by Graham, Thomas This is a very good, short article demonstrating the general character of the revival in Manchuria taking place during the time of Jonathan Goforth. Originally published in a periodical called Springtime, 1912, pp. 266, 267. It is the report of an on-site witness, though incorporating other material, so that at least some of the primary and not to be found in other sources.

About three years ago London was startled by strange happenings in a Presbyterian church. The pulpit was occupied by a Chinese missionary on furlough. He preached in a very quiet way, but as the service proceeded many in the congregation were strangely moved. Ere it closed city men were on their feet confessing Christ under deep emotion. It was startling, but thrilling. What was the explanation? Simply this, that that North London congregation had caught the spirit of the Manchurian Revival. Rev. J. Goforth, the preacher, spoke on the ways of the Spirit and illustrated his theme very amply from the religious awakening in China, Manchuria and Korea, in which he was one of the leaders. Not long before this London episode, Mr. Goforth, whose own field is the Canadian Presbyterian Mission in Honan, was invited to visit Mukden for a ten days' mission. He began by telling the story of the work in Korea, and appealed for prayer that a like blessing might come to the Mukden people. Not a soul responded! Evening meetings are not, as a rule, held in China, but after sunset upwards of eight hundred gathered for another address. Again opportunity was given for voluntary prayer or confession, and the silence seemed deeper than in the morning. The fact was, the people could not pray because a radical work was proceeding in their hearts.

Next morning an ex-elder presented himself at the missionary's house and in Mr. Goforth's presence confessed that he had had money given him for the church and never passed it over. That was the beginning. In a few days men and women were confessing faults and wrongs and even terrible crimes. An elder twice got to his feet in one meeting but could not speak. At last he sprang to the platform and said, Mr. Goforth, I can bear this burden no longer.

Before God and this congregation I must confess my iniquities. Years ago, as all you people know, I was an earnest and sincere Christian. But, alas, I fell! He then told a story that almost shattered every heart. He had even meditated and attempted murder. The whole congregation broke into loud lamentation. What confessions followed in other meetings! An old man bursting into tears said, 'I am sixty-five years of age, and sixty years ago I told a lie about my mother, and she suffered for it. It seemed as if a life-long record of sin had come up before the man's memory, and he was shaken by a tempest of contrition. There were abject confessions of secret idolatry, fraud, theft, adultery, opium smoking, various forms of deceit, resistance to the Spirit, and indifference to the salvation of souls. These were made before the whole congregation, and in great distress. The work was carried on by the native ministers, but the foreign missionaries were thoroughly sympathetic, and one has recorded, 'It has been a most awe-inspiring and humbling experience for us all.' The work spread to out-stations and eventually covered a large area. Conviction and confession were followed by great joy. These Manchurians had never before realised so vividly the

meaning of sin, neither had they ever known such spiritual quickening, power and gladness. Evangelists were soon carrying the Revival in several directions, and to an extent we English people cannot realise the rank and file of the church were spreading the news. One of the most pathetic elements in the movement concerned the Boxer riots. How many of these poor people confessed to falling away during that fierce persecution! And every time a Boxer backslider looked at Mr. Goforth in the Mukden mission he could have seen a scar across the head left by a gash from a Boxer sword. Now the newly-quickened ones are keenly on the outlook for those who fell in the Boxer rebellion and had never come back. The Revival in its early form was almost entirely confined to the Christian community. The fierce fires burnt out sin and pride and indifference in the Church. But, quite naturally, the people outside were impressed. 'Don't go near the Christians,' some said, 'their Spirit has come down, and He is irresistible! You will be drawn in before you know it.' The strangest thing to people without was that sin should be voluntarily confessed. 'What has come over these Christians,' they said, 'Yamen torture could not draw confessions such as these from human lips, and they are respectable people enough!'

These things happened in Manchuria four years ago. The work, however, still goes on, and the Church rapidly multiplies its members. Probably half the population of Manchuria now knows the Christian Gospel, and knows enough to be convinced that Christianity is the true religion. So widely has the movement spread and Christian organisation been extended that the missionaries are anticipating the no distant day when every town and village shall have been linked up and have its Christian agency. Already, Dr. John Ross tells us, idol worship is dead in Manchuria. . is dead in Manchuria.

These are remarkable results to tabulate if we take due note of two points, viz., the size of the country and the short period of Christian history it has known. Manchuria has a population of twenty million Manchus and Chinese. The country occupies the north-east corner of China and is eight hundred miles long by five hundred miles wide. Let us bring home these figures a little closer by saying that the area is three times that of the British Isles. This land is within measurable distance of being covered with Christian agencies. And how long has it taken? Only forty years! Two Irish missionaries went first in 1870, and two Scotch missionaries followed in 1872, of whom Dr. Ross remains to this day. In early years the work was slow and tedious. In 1873 there were three converts. Not until 1895 did numbers begin to mount up. Then the 'new era' dawned. In that year there were 4,000 baptised members, two years later 8,000, next year 14,000, and next year 19,000, with 6,000 catechumens. To-day there are 40,000 members. There are but two churches on this field, the Irish and Scotch Presbyterians, and both work under a Conference that governs the whole field. Manchuria is happy in having no denominations. The native word for Presbyterian is seldom heard. There is just the 'Jesus' or 'Christ' religion, and no other name is used. Neither are there Irish and Scotch Christians. The societies grow up under this Conference which unites the two churches without any consciousness of the differences which separate us in this land. They have united training colleges, language schools and educational institutions. And there is neither Manchu nor Chinese in the Church, but all are one in Christ Jesus. The issue in due course will be a native Church of Christ in Manchuria, self-governed, self-sustained, and self-propagating.

Although there are sixty European missionaries on the field they can do practically nothing in extension. Their energies are fully engaged in examining candidates for membership,

administering the affairs of the churches, organising infant societies, and carrying on medical and educational work. Aggression falls upon the native evangelists and members. The people erect their own churches, support their native workers, and themselves give liberally of both time and money for missionary work. Members give a day or two days a week to voluntary work in furthering the cause, just as local preachers and teachers at home give part of Sunday, only the Manchurians go much further afield. A man became a patient in the Mukden hospital who knew absolutely nothing of Christianity. Before he left he had the Gospel in his heart and strongly wished to make it widely known. Among new people and in his own way that man won two thousand disciples for Christ. What he did in point of method, thousands are doing this day. To the east of Manchuria lies Korea, whence the revival came, and further east Japan. All three are sharing the gracious visitation, and Korea promises to become the first entirely Christian land. We shall bring the camera again to the Far East. camera a reference to the series title, Snapshots from the Mission Fields.

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