

REV. IRVING R. STEBBINSP. I. R. Stebbins

Irving R. Stebbins fellowshiped with his Lord in prayer on the morning of January 5, 1971, as was his custom. When he failed to appear for breakfast at the Alliance Home in Deland, Florida, where he had resided for the past few months, he was found on his knees, but his spirit had quietly left the body. It was apparently a heart attack which had so suddenly ushered him into the Gloryland. For him, the transition was an easy one, for he lived daily in the presence of the Lord. Family and friends will miss him here, but he has joined the circle of those who preceded him on the way in the presence of Him he loved and served so faithfully.

Mr. Stebbins had a rich and fruitful ministry, serving in Viet Nam from 1918 to 1961. Following retiral he pastored the Glen Burnie church in Baltimore, Maryland for 2 years. It was while he pastored this congregation that his wife (nee Mary Hartman) went to be with her Lord. Six of the seven Stebbins children have served as fulltime Christian workers.

Born in 1894 in New Haven, Conn., Irving later attended Business College and worked as salesman and clerk for eight years before attending Nyack Missionary College (then, the Missionary Training Institute). In his initial application for overseas service with The C&MA, he stated his motive as follows: "The conviction that souls are dying without Christ and a settled conviction that God wants my life for His service. My decision to become a worker for God is the result of years of growing conviction that He wanted me for His service." He further stated, "If He calls, He will equip, - I believe with all my heart." The sense of conviction, so strongly stated in those early days, never diminished through the five decades that followed.

Because of the urgent need for recruits in Indo-China in 1918, young Stebbins was sent to the field without the usual requirement of 2 years home service. In later years he said he was able to fulfill that requirement as pastor in Baltimore during 1962 and 63. Stebbins arrived in Tonkin, Viet Nam on November 2, 1918 in a party of 4 new recruits accompanied by Dr. R. A. Jaffray. Others in the party were John Olsen, R. M. Jackson, and Miss Mary Hartman. A few months later, Irving Stebbins and Mary Hartman announced their engagement and were married in Canton, China in March of 1920.

When young Stebbins and John Olsen were located in Saigon a few months after arrival in Indo-China, they knew neither Vietnamese nor French. Olsen had studied Chinese for one year, so was considered the "senior" of the two young bachelors. They had the joy of leading the first convert to the Lord after they had lived there several months. Fifteen months after arrival on the field, Stebbins was married, and subsequently, they served together both in Central and South Viet Nam. They had a rich and rewarding ministry and saw the growth of the church from a small group in Tourane (Danang) of about 30 believers in 1918 to its present strength and maturity.

Six of the seven children born to Irving and Mary Stebbins came to enrich the family while they served overseas, and the other was born at Nyack on their first furlough. Four of the children were to return to the land of their birth to serve their Lord and Master. Harriett (Mrs. G. E. Irwin) arrived first and has served with her husband for many years among the Koho-speaking tribes people at Dalat and Dilinh. Ruth (Mrs. E. E.) Thompson first went to Cambodia but transferred to Viet Nam in 1965. Mr. and Mrs. Thompson died as martyrs to the cause of Christ at Banmethuot at the time of the TET offensive, along with four other C&NA missionaries (N.R. Zeimer, Carolyn Griswold, Leon

Griswold, and Ruth Wilting). When informed of this by phone, Mr. Stebbins said, "Just think, my Ruthie will wear a Martyr's Crown."

George and his wife served in Viet Nam for one term with Overseas Crusades, Tom, youngest of the children, presently is chairman of the Viet Nam mission. He has had a markedly blessed ministry during his 3 terms of service.

Two other daughters, Betty (Mrs. Floyd Gibbs) and Anne (Mrs. David Moore) have been missionaries serving with The C&MA.

The life and ministry of Rev. Irving R. Stebbins has greatly enriched and blessed many. Throughout the Church in Viet Nam he is remembered and honoured. Younger missionaries, of whom I was one, learned much from the example Mr. and Mrs. Stebbins set before them. His influence continues on an enlarged scale through his children still active in the Lord's service. The C&MA has been the better for his valuable contributions. Surely his entrance into the Lord's presence has been to hear what all devoted servants of God count as being above all other rewards - Christ Himself saying, "Thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Servant of God, well done!
Thy glorious warfare's past
The Battle's fought, the race is won,
And thou art crowned at last;
Of all thy heart's desire
triumphantly possessed;
Lodged by the ministerial choir
In thy Redeemer's breast.
In condescending love,
Thy ceaseless prayer be heard;
And bade thee suddenly remove
To thy complete reward.
With saints enthroned on high,
Thou dost thy Lord proclaim,
And still to God salvation cry,
Salvation to the Lamb!