



A New Missionary in Annam.

Apr. 18, 1914 A. H. BIRKEL. p. 40 A.W.

The following letter sent to the Young People's Society of the Gospel Tabernacle, New York, by our brother, Mr. Birkel, contains an interesting account of his journey to Annam, as also some of his first impressions of that land.

MY DEAR BROTHER HAKES,

President, Young People's Alliance.

Greetings from Annam to all the young people and friends. The long journey has been accomplished in safety and with great joy; for in being here I feel I am in the place of God's appointment; and we know from experience that that is the place of joy.

It took fifty-three days, or the greater part of two months, to travel from New York to Tourane; which is half the circumference of the world. And surely they were days of great blessing. From the hour of departure until I arrived in my new home the presence of the Lord was such a blessed reality. I felt as though I were borne on unseen wings above the storms and dangers. The fact that you were praying for me was a continual source of strength and encouragement.

The overland trip to Seattle with the various meetings en route resulted in blessing to our own souls; and we thank God for the sinners that were led to accept Jesus through the convicting power of the Holy Ghost. Some Christians were deeply moved and found the joy that passes all understanding as they made a full and a complete surrender of their lives to the Lord. Only those who have yielded their ambitions, plans, and all they have and are and hope to be, really know what it is to have a touch of heaven here.

From the time we left Seattle until we reached fair Japan the vessel was pitching and rolling most of the time. While this naturally caused a great deal of seasickness among the passengers, I was fortunate not to be affected.

There is something inspiring about being on a small ship when a great storm is sweeping over the mighty ocean. One feels his own insignificance, and is impressed in a wonderful way with the power and greatness of the Creator, whom we that believe on His Son, call our Father.

What a difference it makes in what one is trusting. When the storm was at its height some of the passengers who spent their time in playing cards, and manifested a dislike for spiritual things, became anxious, and asked if we thought there was any danger of the ship becoming unmanageable and sinking. To be sure the ship in which they were trusting was very fragile; and if anything went wrong it might carry them to a watery grave and a hopeless eternity. How much better it is to trust in a living, loving, and almighty God. Depending absolutely upon Him casts out every fear and causes the very peace of the Lord to reign in our hearts even in the presence of great danger.

The first day of the new year brought us our first glimpse of fair Japan; and the following day we landed in Yokohama. The city was gaily decorated for the holiday season, which usually lasts several days. Of the several days spent in this port one was spent in visiting Tokyo, the capital of the empire. It is a very beautiful city, and

would compare favorably with our large centers in many respects.

As the steamship company offers a through railroad ticket from Yokohama to Moji without extra charge, we decided to accept it, and thus be able to stop over at Hiroshima, where the Alliance mission is located. Here we spent two days; and the fellowship with our friends and fellow missionaries of the Alliance was a time of refreshing. The Lord is blessing the work and workers in Japan and greater things are expected.

The voyage from Moji to Shanghai was calm and uneventful. In the latter city we were glad for the opportunity to visit the Alliance work in charge of Mr. and Mrs. Woodberry and their two daughters. It was a privilege to look into the bright faces of the boys and girls in the school, and say a word to them. Oh, the possibilities of these lives if they are wholly consecrated to the Lord. China will feel the influence of these young people if they become instruments in God's hands. Pray for them.

From Shanghai we went to Hongkong where after two days of visiting and shopping Brother Allen, my traveling companion, and I parted. He went on his way to Wuchow, South China, while I continued on my way to Annam.

A great deal might be written about the places and people we saw. To land on an oriental shore is like being plunged into a new world, where everything is so different and entirely new. The people with their strange clothing of bright colors, the houses in which they live, their peculiar manners and customs, together with the natural beauty of the Orient, are an endless source of interest and delight.

However, a missionary is sure to be impressed with the needs of the people more than with anything else. And it is not necessary to look far to see the great need; for it is on every side. Surely, these lands are in the grip of the wicked one. As you mingle with the people and see the sin, superstition and idolatry, you wish you had a life to invest in each place. And I am sure such an investment would bring the largest possible returns. Think of the joy it would bring to the heart of our Saviour, and to us, to see some of these who now sit in darkness, walk in the Light of the glorious Son.

Going from Hongkong to Annam was something to which I had looked forward with special interest; for it is out of the beaten track of travel. It requires from three to four days to cover the distance; and it is a most pleasant voyage at this time of the year. There was such a great contrast between the stormy trip across the Pacific, and this restful sail on the tropical seas.

On nearing a strange and little heard of land like Annam one becomes rather impatient in his desire to get a glimpse of the people and place where he shall live. Late Saturday night we sighted the Tourane light and early Sunday morning, January 25th, we anchored in beautiful Tourane Bay. I was expecting to see a low, marshy, fever-infested land; but to my surprise and great delight high mountains met my gaze on almost every side, as I went on deck shortly after sunrise. Yes, Annam is a beautiful place even at this time of the year, when at home the landscape is bleak and barren. Here everything is beautiful and green continually, because it is always warm. Light white suits and large pith helmets to protect the head from the dangerous tropical sun, are in style all the year around. One does not dare to step out of doors even for the fraction of a minute without a head covering.

I might mention how I got ashore. The missionaries

A New Missionary in Annam.

Continued from page 40

did not expect me for a few days, and consequently nobody came to meet me. We were anchored about three miles out in the bay; and in order to get to shore one must take a small native boat, which resembles a large canoe. The sail across the bay to the customs house wharf was very interesting. I was now among people who speak only French or Annamese. It was not very difficult to make the French customs officials understand that I would leave the luggage with them, and go to the mission immediately. If anyone was ever surprised the missionaries certainly were as I walked in and introduced myself.

After breakfast I attended my first Annamese service. Quite a number of natives were present; and although I could understand nothing I praised God for the privilege of being there. Mr. Hosler has just begun holding some services regularly. The others are still studying the language.

Some had told me I would be charged a heavy duty on the things in my outfit; but I left that to the Lord, and was assured that He was arranging everything. Much to the surprise of those on the mission I was charged a very nominal sum.

As it was Annamese New Year the teachers were on their vacations, so a trip into the villages had been arranged. The very next morning after my arrival Mr. Hosler, Mr. Soderberg and I started very early. It was my initiation. We slept in Annamese thatched roof huts on native beds, which are boards covered with thin straw mats. Chopsticks were used in eating the food of the people. It was necessary to close our eyes to many things lest our appetites should be affected. I must say the experience was enjoyed; although we were drenched as we walked from village to village in the rain. The tall wet grass made walking difficult at times.

The experiences of the past few weeks seem almost like a-dream. But the fact that I am really in Annam, the place to which I have longed to go, brings satisfaction in every sense of the word. I would not be anywhere else, for in being here I feel I am in God's will.

My heart goes out to these dear people for whom Christ died, and who as yet has not been presented to them as their Saviour. Oh, how I wish I could speak their language. I have started to study it and find it very interesting. I would ask the Young People to pray especially that the Lord may give me the language speedily. Pray for Annam with its great needs and wonderful opportunities. As the trying heat has already begun, pray also that the Lord may keep us in body, in order that we may not be interrupted in our work of acquiring this difficult language.

The difference in time between New York and Annam is about twelve hours. So when I pray especially for the Young People and their work on Saturday mornings between the hours of eight and nine, your regular Friday night meeting will be in progress. May the Lord bless you all in your labor of love and self-denial.