

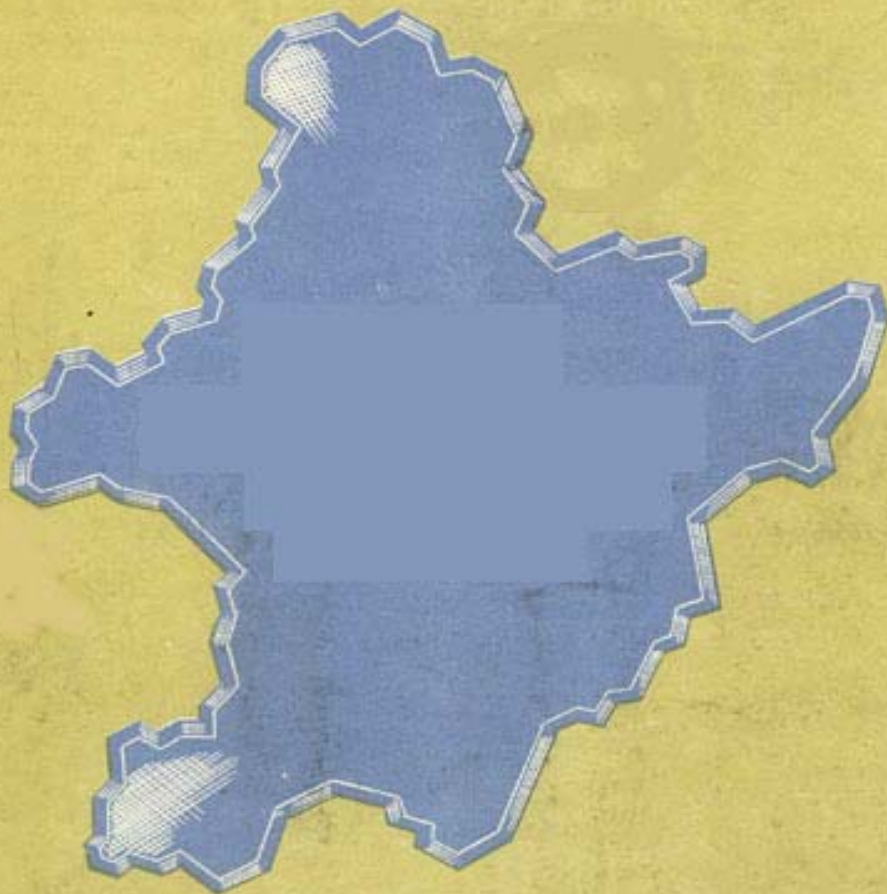


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MANCHURIA

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Missionary Work In Manchuria

Fantastic Tales Of Exorcizing Demons From Natives, Growth Of Religion Related By Mr. And Mrs. Tharp, Of Lingyuan

THE ideal of a new Asia will not be accomplished through reeking tubes or economic regimentation, nor by commercially inspired intervention of foreign interests, but by the slow penetration of the individual human heart.

It is a long and at times discouraging process, a struggle against centuries of deep-rooted superstition and fanaticism, against a mystic Oriental complex, but there are sincere people who go quietly and confidently about their gigantic task, dedicating their lives to its service, and calm and content in the conviction that they can do no less.

Such missionaries of Christian sincerity are Mr. and Mrs. Robert N. Tharp, now in Dairen in brief respite from their humanitarian labors in quaint Ling-yuan, a picturesque rural community in Jehol province, steeped in centuries of Chinese mysticism.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Tharp were born in Manchuria. They come of influential families, have studied abroad, have the means and opportunity to live where they will, but they have returned to the interior to dedicate their lives to the emancipation of the Oriental masses. Knowing as few Occidentals can the Oriental mind, understanding its convention and custom, appreciating too its background of inscrutable mysticism, they are working diligently and happily, not for the emancipation of the Orient, but for the release of a few souls from the age-old fetters of fear and superstition that make the penetration of modern civilization but a surface sham.

The Orient has not been modernized, although clad in the Oriental habit. Dairen, with its shop-windows, its boulevards, its street cars and its Occidental clothes, looks to the dweller in the Manchurian interior like a little bit of America. Tientsin in its foreign concession like an offshoot of Paris; Shanghai like a bit of Blighty. But behind the outward manifestation of western convention, the East is still the East.

The Japanese businessman goes to work in American clothes, conducts his business along American lines; but when he returns to his home in the evening, he dons the characteristic kimono and sandals, and until the next morning lives the life of his ancestors. Even the skilled Chinese surgeon, with the advantages of the finest scientific training that Western universities can afford, when his own little one is ill relies not on his skill, but calls in the native doctor, subjecting the child to indescribable tortures, revolting to the Occidental reason.

Thousands of Chinese go through the outward manifestation of Christian religion, but in the emergencies, in sickness and in death, fling themselves blindly onto the laps of their own mystic, revengeful deities. Millions more make no pretense at mental and spiritual conversion, but instead lead a shadowy life, hemmed in by fear and superstition that keeps

them a race apart, without benefit of Occidental reason and emotions, and with no possible approach to the spiritual.

SERENITY OF EMANCIPATION

And dotting the masses of humanity, still creeping in the shade of centuries of mysticism, here and there is one bright, fearless face,

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ignorant perhaps of some of the outward manifestations of western comfort, but glowing with the serenity of emancipation. These are the souls that Christianity has really reached. They are not iconoclasts, not religious fanatics, but emancipated Orientals, free to think, to feel, and to learn.

Mr. and Mrs. Tharp told a strange story of mystic rites so strange that they mock the fancy; of bandit raids, of natural phenomena, of tremendous strides of industrial progress since the introduction of modern methods by Japan, of the trials and disappointments as the exhilarating experiences of their strange life, and through it all ran a sweet and beautiful absolute conviction.

"It is not a matter of success or failure", said Mr. Tharp, quietly. "I have had many opportunities; but this is my life". Mrs. Tharp's quiet eyes revealed the same sentiment. Mrs. Tharp is the daughter of a Dutch diplomat, Mr. Tharp son of a British missionary. Both were born in Manchuria, grew up with the natives, played with them as children, know their very thoughts. Both went abroad to receive the best advantages of Occidental education. But both returned, uniting their lives in a common devotion. Still on the threshold of life, and with a full realization of what their consecration means, they face their self-imposed future with no regrets.

With a wealth of experience and a knowledge of the Oriental mind such as is theirs, they could write a book that would instantly be a best seller. But they are not interested in writings; and they speak only with a hope for an understanding of the problem that is so real to them.

They told a story of a Manchu woman possessed of an evil spirit. Reading the querulousness in their interviewer's eyes, Mr. Tharp broke off abruptly to assure him that those who know Oriental life as he does accept the Bible literally and in toto. There are evil spirits, and no one who has lived with the Chinese people would raise an eyebrow. The miracles of the New Testament, which even devout Western churchmen explain away by scientific interpretation, are being actually enacted every day in the impenetrable darkness of the Orient. It was doubtless his contact with the Oriental mind that made Paul write as he did. It is perhaps the more congenial atmosphere of the dark ignorance of the farthest Orient that brings the forces of evil here, and thus leads to the Western attitude of ridiculing what they do not see.

This poor woman and both Mr. And Mrs. Tharp earnestly stressed that this was a

personal experience was a witch. She was actually ruled by a spirit, who extorted fearful toll of her. It was not a mental state, for if the poor woman did not make the obeisances demanded of her, she was visited with terrible suffering. For days at end when the spirit was displeased, she would go into a lifeless coma, from which no force could release her until the wicked one was appeased. Sometimes this was the burning of incense, or the gift of food, or even the performance of some wicked act by her two sons. The Chinese women would come in and resort to the most hideous practices to release her, such as beating, pinching, pouring water over her, and the like, but all to no avail.

FRIGHTFUL PAINS

The two sons were very unhappy, but reconciled to their plight until one day they happened to come into conversation with an old Chinese who had been Christianized. Through him they became convinced that the power of the spiritual God was sufficient to enable them to break away from the dominance of the evil one. Fearless and determined, they took their stand, and began to pray.

This apparently made the evil spirit very angry, for he took fearful possession of them. They, who had never known a day's illness, were suddenly seized with frightful pain. But they fought off the spirit, reasoning that if their new God was all-powerful, he could drive off the evil one. Their supplications were answered, and they were relieved. Thus thwarted, the evil one descended upon the mother, and she was seized with a lengthy coma.

But the boys were adamant. Alarmed over their parent's condition, however, they determined to appeal to the support of their new God. Promptly their prayers were answered and the old lady emerged from a coma of many days, upon which all the horrible expedients of the neighboring hags had not prevailed. The old woman dully accepted Christianity and became a new person, and her faith has never been shaken.

The spirits are real animate beings to the Chinese, powerful and avenging, whimsically capricious. Once, many years ago, they were humans. Sometimes, through circumstance or unions, they attain tremendous power. The native efforts at appeasement are to the Occidental mind childish and grotesque. They may consist of burnt offerings, self-inflicted suffering, or the performance of diabolical acts which are dictated by the evil one.

It is well known custom of the Chinese upon the death of one of the more prominent of their society to dispatch in effigy at his burial those accommodations and comforts which he will need in the spirit world. These are usually made in paper facsimiles and burnt. Thus, if the deceased had a car or carriage on earth, a paper replica is made of it, and sent after his spirit in smoke.

The spirits themselves are capricious, however, and the devotion is not one of love but of appeasement, and all manner of cunning and deceit is resorted to in its performance. The Chinese are always trying to "put something over" on their gods. These spirits control all physical forces, and often intervene in human conduct. The harvest is a constant worry to the Chinese peasant. If the seasons are unkind, the gods are

ill-humored, and must be appeased. Weird rites are performed.

When rain is needed, it is the custom to build a theatre and arrange a native performance to humor the gods. This is usually in the form of a shadow-play.

NATIVE CUNNING

The native cunning of the Chinese comes out, and there is often considerable “squeeze” and racketeering in such matters. When rain does not come, the spirits are displeased by this invidiousness.

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The missionaries are openly scornful of this fanatasm, and quietly pray to their true God lest by some coincidence the appeals might appear to be answered, and thus build belief in a false god. Invariably their prayers are answered. They then appeal to the reason of the fanatics, and often in individual cases succeed. Once the Chinese has been shaken of his blind superstition, he is a new person.

The common peasant, of course, makes no attempt at reason or understanding. He merely accepts himself as a helpless victim of the caprices of the occult powers, and he is putty in the hands of the priest, a virtual witch-doctor. But on the other hand there are intelligent and intellectual Chinese, who delve deeply into the mystic cults, far beyond the rational comprehension of the Occidental mind. But their basis is not that of logic or asceticism, but a strange, mystic science of its own. Some of the priests are skilled and studious in the craft, and withal cunning and evil, so that they wield diabolical power over the hapless masses.

Chinese conduct is motivated and screened by childish whims and customs. For instance, women place flowers in their hair to keep them from doing evil. Quite unreasoning, they continue their evil ways, and never stop to think that the mechanical practices are totally ineffective. Occasionally the missionary is able to arrest their attention, and, pointing out this ridiculousness, appeal to their childish reason, and start the elementary process of thought. It is then quite a simple matter to reclaim them.

All this will sound strange and trivial to the western mind, both in respect of the native blindness and the simple directness of the missionaries. But in this, said Mr. and Mrs. Tharp, lies the whole problem of the East. The swiftness and complexity of western life leaves no room for elemental spiritual observation. But against the simple, primitive Asiatic background, the spiritual powers that make the Bible such an incomprehensible book to the western world are clearly manifest, and very real, and one who knows cannot mistake them.

Strange as this may sound to the western ear, one cannot in talking earnestly with such persons as Mr. and Mrs. Tharp lightly disregard it. They are not fanatics, but quiet, intelligent, educated people, who have all the advantages of western culture, but yet who can look into the very heart and soul and mind of the Orient, And they do not speak in theories but in what to them are clearly established facts. There is the utmost conviction,

utmost understanding, in their manner. They simply say the west cannot know, cannot understand.

FANTASTIC STORIES

The fantastic stories of Llama worship, the mysteries of Tibet, parts of which no white has ever penetrated, the strange reports which have fascinated western minds, are common realities to Mr. and Mrs. Tharp. Travellers and writers have faithfully reported, though they have not understood. Such books as Nevius' "Demon Possession" and Mme. Alexander's account of Tibet in the Penguin series are true and faithful reports, which in the light of Mr. and Mrs. Tharp's understanding take on new meaning.

Turning to less fantastic matters, Mr. And Mrs. Tharp gave a brief but accomplished review of the recent development of the Manchurian interior, and paid marked tribute to the accomplishment of the Japanese in their short period of recent supervision.

There is a distinct improvement of the average lot in the Manchurian hinterland, though no visible impression has been made on the mystic Chinese mind. With the advent of agricultural machinery and something of agricultural science, crops have been considerably improved, and some western comforts have come to the natives.

Especially has the improvement of communications been an important factor. The extension of the Chengteh railroad to Jehol, and the building of modern roads have distinctly changed the face of dark Jehol. Crops have improved, grades are better and prices have slightly improved.

A reforestation program has been instituted, with remarkable results, and natural resources are being developed on scientific lines. Administration, too, has been greatly improved under the Japanese system.

A notable factor is the suppression of banditry. The Manchurian banditry has for many years been an interesting estate, dominating with boldness and assurance. The bandit chief was usually a brave, powerful fellow who rose over his fellows by physical and mental ability. He would gather a band of lesser luminaries about him, a virtual little emperor. The vendetta would lie in wait along a highway and seize the unfortunate traveller, strip him of his goods or his wealth, and occasionally hold him for ransom. Sometimes they would take over a town and establish it as headquarters, later abandoning it for another. Sometimes they would swoop upon a town and plunder it. With some a certain code of honor, much after the type of Robin Hood, existed. Others were thoroughly ruthless. All defied authority, and knew only the rule of force.

EVIL OF BANDITRY

Quite often the bands would have a more or less loose affiliation, and work in concert under a bandit chief. The loosely-administered state authority was powerless against the bandit evil. There was often corruption and protection.

The Japanese have virtually stamped out the bandit evil, and the thoroughfares of inner Manchuria are now virtually safe.

The veil of antiquity is gradually being lifted over vast hinterland of China and Manchuria, but there is still a great deal to fascinate the western traveller. . . picturesque villages, grotesque temples and images, native customs that have persisted through the ages. But remarkable changes are taking place, and the margin of untarnished antiquity is rapidly retreating. Such coastal centers as Dairen and Shanghai are virtually western in outward appearances. Tientsin is rapidly changing, and two years have made tremendous difference on Peking, which is still one of the most picturesque of native cities. But parts of the vast hinterland still sleep in the obscurity of the Oriental past.

One of the notable attractions of Ling-yuan is a notable fossil-bed, from which rare and

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fascinating specimens of pre-historic marine life have been recovered in thousands, many of them being offered commercially on the market. Mr. Tharp remembers as a boy when this deposit was untouched. He sent photographs to the London papers. Lately Japanese scientists have been concentrating their attentions on the remarkable deposit and much should be learned of scientific interest.

Their lives early dedicated to their mission of love, Mr. and Mrs. Tharp returned to Jehol five years ago to begin their mission. They belong to the Plymouth Brethern, and their work is liberally endowed by friends abroad.

They go about an extensive circle in an old car, working their mission of light, and have many interesting experiences to relate of their travels and of their work. Just now they are here to pick up a new automobile subscribed by friends, and arriving from Tokyo. A tribute to the efforts of the Japanese in their development plan, they hope to be able to drive through to Ling-yuan from Dairen.