

Third Letter. Read Sun. Apr. 4/75

Canton Nov. 20 1874

Dear Childrew

I would be glad if it were possible to photograph to your minds the scenes which are passing before our eyes here in Canton. If you could actually be here for a single half hour you would never cease to feel an interest in China & in the great work of giving the gospel to its millions of people. From the verandah of Dr Happer's house or Mrs Preston's you would look out upon myriads of boats which swarm upon the Pearl river & the numerous canals leading from it. Each boat is the house & home of one or more families. It is not more than six or eight feet wide & is only covered with matting or bamboo & yet it serves for carrying passengers & goods & for the kitchen, parlor & dining room of a sometimes numerous family. At night the members of the various households crawl into little snuggeries where we should hardly think it possible to stow our baggage; but they sleep as soundly as the inmates of stately palaces. Their meals are prepared in a place occupying not more than one square yard, & they consist mainly of a cup of tea & a bowl of rice which they poke into their mouths in the funniest possible manner with chop sticks. During the day most of the men are engaged as laborers on shore, while their wives & children remain on board & pick up what they can by carrying passengers. All the women are good rowers, & each son & daughter, down to the age of eight years old also pulls the oar. Smaller children play about the deck which has no railing & generally they are secured by a rope which passes under their arms, & is fastened to the boat. To rescue one of them therefore from drowning is no more serious a matter than to pull up a fish by a line. These people are born in these little floating houses, & every day you may see the celebration of a marriage between the families of two respective boats. On such occasions there is always a great display of red wedding garments, furnished to all the guests & a flashing of tinsel & gilt ornaments, & the twang of the most fearful guitars accompanied with the din of gongs & the roar of innumerable fire crackers - China is the original source of fire crackers. It is difficult to know how the average American boy could get on with his Fourth of July but for those spiteful little red packages of patriotic noise which are imported from this great Empire. But in Canton & other Chinese cities one hears these crackers on all days & at various hours of the night. They are fired not singly, but by hundreds, or thousands, at a time. What do you suppose the object to be? It is not to celebrate the 'spirit of '76' but to clear the atmosphere of a different kind of spirits, or ghosts which are supposed to hover over the city & bring mischief to the people. It is a part of heathen worship. The ringing of gongs is also employed for the same purpose. It is difficult to understand why evil spirits should be so much afraid of fire works & gongs when the Chinese themselves are so fond of every species of noise & confusion. All night long Canton is filled with perpetual din. While the priests frighten away evil spirits, watchmen blow horns, & ring bells to alarm the thieves, the proprietors of dance houses

attract customers by rude music of every sort. Nobody seems to sleep. The great city of a million, or a million & a half of inhabitants has kept up this ceaseless roar of teeming life, night & day, for century after century. I can give you no idea of the great age of China & these cities. Long before our Saviour appeared on earth China was an old country. It had something of civilization when David & Solomon cut on the throne of Israel & even when the Patriarchs kept their flocks in Palestine, this same Chinese nation was in existence. For two thousand years before our Saxon ancestors had emerged from barbarism, China had a history & probably this same river teemed with boats & resounded with the noises of a busy population. How thankful we should be for the gospel which in a few centuries has raised us up so much above this old empire of more than three thousand years!

One strange thing which impresses every visitor in China is the fact that so many customs seem the reverse of our own. The polite Chinaman in shaking hands grasps, not yours, but his own. With us, black is the color for mourning, but he uses white. We read our books from left to right, but his are read from right to left. Here you will find men in the kitchen, in the laundry, & in millinery & dress making shops while women row the boats from place to place along the river. In one country the murderer takes vengeance by smiting down his enemy, but the enraged Chinaman takes his sweetest revenge by killing himself. He does this because he knows that his foe will be more in fear from his disembodied spirit than of any harm ^{from} of his body's bodily presence. At home kite-flying is the amusement of boys, but here men play with kites while boys gravely observe their success. You may see women smoking cigars & a military officer with a string of beads around his neck & a fan in his hand. We show our respect by taking off the hat; a Chinaman for the same reason keeps his on. In our schools a boy may not even whisper but here all the the boys in school are shouting their reading lessons at the top of their voices. Perhaps we ought to expect the Chinaman to differ from us in every thing, as their country is on the opposite side of the globe & their whole life of course is up side down.

We have seen some strange contrasts here between the religion of the Chinese & that blessed truth which our missionaries are trying to teach them. We went one day to hear the Buddhist priests chant their evening prayers in a great temple. There were three immense images of Buddha, bright with gold-
-ing & seated upon thrones. In front of these, the priests, clothed in light drab gowns & having their heads closely shaved, placed themselves in rows in a kneeling posture. One of them went first upon a high platform & beat an immense drum to wake up the god & give him notice that they were about to worship. They then began to chant in a loud, nasal voice, accompanied by a rapid rolling beat upon a small drum or gong while the leader gave at intervals a few sharp strokes upon a bell lest Buddha might forget, or become inattentive to their prayers. After a little, they arose & began to march around the great idol's throne chanting as they went. They were still marching when we left the temple. It was sad to feel that we should never meet them again till the judgment.

& most of all, that we could do nothing for them. They had treated us kindly answering our questions through an interpreter, while putting on their priestly garments, & preparing themselves for their stupid ceremonies. We felt no little interest in them. In this immense temple whose buildings & gardens cover about forty acres, we saw a city full of sacred pigs. These are not really worshipped, but it is considered an acceptable service to Buddha, to preserve the life of animals & when a man dies instead of leaving his money for the support of widows & orphans or for any kind of relief to his own species he bequeaths his property to a pig, with a provision that he shall fare sumptuously in the temple as long as its life shall last. Some of these porkers which we saw were very old & so fat that existence seemed a burden, while others were young & in the enjoyment of all the happiness that a pig is capable of. How terrible is heathenism that it should suffer so much many immortal men & women & helpless children to perish uncared for, while it bestows its foolish sympathy upon hampered brutes. Here in Canton every year hundreds of the poor are turned out to waste & die upon the street uncared for while the pigs of Buddha temple trample in the mire that which the poor dying beggar would be glad to receive. Surely these are the habitations of cruelty.

Let us now change the scene by spending a few moments in the girls' school conducted by our missionaries, the Misses Hoyer & Miss Bouch. As you are an honored guest, each girl neatly & rather prettily dressed in Chinese costume comes up to greet you by shaking her hands together while she makes silently a bow. Their gait is very funny as some of them have to peg their way along in little shoes not more than two inches long, their feet having been almost entirely destroyed by cruel bandaging. They repeat numerous portions of Scripture for you in a sort of chanting style & then while Miss Hattie Hoyer leads them with the Cabinet Organ, they sing with clear ringing voices many of our most beautiful Sabbath School Hymns. The Chinese really have no music until they learn it in our schools & churches. No where in this Empire, from Peking to Canton have I heard from voices or instruments any thing that could be called a tune, except as learned from the missionaries. Blessed will that day be when China shall resound with the songs of salvation! Dear Brethren, I know of nothing so likely to hasten that day, as for the children of Christian Europe & America to give their Sabbath lessons & Sabbath hymns to the millions of children in this land. Every Sunday School teacher in every school should contribute something to this work. The great masses of men & women must doubtless perish without the truth, but for the children there is hope. Will you not help to sustain the hundreds of boys' schools & girls' schools like these in Canton, for there is here also a boys' boarding school under the care of Rev Mr Henry. There are besides several day schools taught by native teachers. Dr Happer has a training school for young men who may become ministers. It is a blessed work. Help us to enlarge it a hundred fold.

Your affec. friend

F. F. Collinwood