

## CAN A CHINAMAN BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

BY REV. FREDERIC J. MASTERS, D. D.

A FEW weeks ago there appeared in the columns of a widely circulated journal on this coast the following statement:

"The Chinese are irredeemably and irretrievably bad and vile, as a rule, and all the efforts to christianize them only make them greater hypocrites than ever. This is no slander, but a grave and solemn truth, and can be verified by the sad experience of men and women on this coast who have labored long and earnestly to convert them. It is utter folly to dream of the Chinese embracing the christian religion, for it is alien to their disposition."

If this is a mistaken view of the results of Chinese missions, it is time that something was said on the side of the truth; but if it is true as alleged, that the effect of christian work among the Chinese is to make that people worse instead of better, then it is time the missionaries, if fools, were convinced of their delusion, or, if knaves, were called to account for their dishonesty, and that the churches withdraw their forces to more promising fields.

That among the Chinese are found some very depraved specimens of humanity, my recent papers to THE CALIFORNIAN will attest. Is that so strange? It would indeed be strange if the Asiatics in our midst, the majority of whom represent the peasant class and many of them the dregs of a heathen population, should be discovered to be saints, or be found among us with habits and character averaging as high as the same class brought up in christian lands. As things look, *our race* cannot set up very high claims to social virtue. No intelligent man who lives in this land of churches and bibles

can walk the streets of our cities at night, or read reports of official corruption and rapacity, or the sickening accounts of daily atrocities, social scandals, dueling, debauchery, villainy, and crime, and then turn round to fling pharisaical stones at a Chinaman for vices, habits and customs that are the outgrowth of a heathen environment that has made him what he is. It will be well to bear in mind that when christian missionaries found our ancestors a race of half-naked savages, idolators and pirates, the Chinese had seen over a thousand years of highly civilized life. Remembering, therefore, what christianity has done in civilizing the Anglo Saxon race, it does not become us to gather up our skirts and give John Chinaman a wide sweep as too common and unclean for the gospel. Nor is it right for us whose institutions and habits are the slow product of a thousand years of christian ancestry, to conclude missions a failure because a generation of christian work has not regenerated four hundred millions of people; has not made them better than ourselves; has not already ushered in the "nobler modes of life, sweeter manners, purer laws of the Christ that is to be."

The question whether a Chinaman can be converted is often asked, not with cynical scorn, but in the spirit of sympathetic appreciation of the immense difficulties that confront the missionary in his work.

In China the vastness of the field, the density of the population, the conservatism of the people, the tenacity with which they cling to national customs and traditions, the philosophical and religious systems that for forty centuries have molded Chinese thought and crystallized their habits; the tremendous influence of the clans and

ancestral religion are, it must be admitted, conditions very unfavorable to the propagation of a new faith.

One might expect to find a more favorable field for missionary enterprise among Chinese residing in a christian land, but this is not the case. The little credit a Chinaman gets on this coast for his christian profession; the cold suspicion with

made upon defenceless Chinese, even upon their women and children, as I have seen myself, do not make the white man's religion, morals and social life particularly attractive to the average Chinese mind. In the face of such gigantic difficulties one can excuse the skepticism that underlies the question, "Can a Chinaman become a christian?" The marvel is



Rev. Chan Hon Fan, Methodist.

which he is often treated, as if he must necessarily be a hypocrite; the anti-Chinese sentiment of the coast, shared even by some ministers of religion; the appalling immorality and godlessness of our cities, which a Chinaman is not slow to detect; the fresh memories of murdered kinsmen, of riots, boycotts and savage oppression; and the frequent hoodlum assaults

that any Chinaman will receive christianity from a white man's lips. Much of the popular information about Chinese missions at home and abroad has been gathered from traders, naval officers, and globe trotters, who, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred have never been inside of a mission church or school and are as competent to give information of the results of



Gee Gam, Congregational Mission, S. F.

Rev. Luke Lowe, Victoria, B. C.

Lee Tong Hay, Methodist, S. F.

Rev. Tong Keet Hing, Baptist, S. F.

christian work in China as an average heathen Chinese merchant on Dupont street, or a Chinese sailor would be to estimate the christianity of America, judged by what he sees on Tar Flat or the Barbary Coast, or the number of white people that he sees going to church on Sundays. Travelers in China would not be likely to go to missionaries for information about the tea and silk trade and commerce in general. It is very strange that when these travelers are in search of information about missionary work they avoid the very people who are best informed on the subject, and go to men who know more about clubs than churches and who take more interest in horse-racing than they do in the regeneration of mankind. The same may be said of the majority of visitors to our local Chinatown. Where one visits the missions nine hundred and ninety-nine goes slumming. Chinatown guides who are not usually regarded as the burning and shining lights of christianity, and who, it is safe to say, have never seen the inside of a mission church, are taken as infallible authorities upon everything pertaining to missionary work; and it is out of information supplied by them that the observing truth-seeking traveler, writes his newspaper sketches and prepares his speeches. He has gone through China and California and has never seen a single Chinese christian! It reminds one of the East India missionary who stated in a speech a few days ago that during ten years spent in Bengal he had never seen a tiger, a statement which, to ignorant minds would be sufficient to cast discredit upon every Bengal tiger hunter's story ever published. As a rule, men see what they look for.

In China nearly fifty thousand men and women have made an open profession of the christian faith, have given evidence of a change of heart and life, and have been admitted to the churches of the different protestant missions. In addition to this it is estimated there are over a hundred

thousand more who are regular attendants at the mission churches. All this is practically the result of only twenty-five years of christian work. On the Pacific Coast during about the same time over two thousand Chinese have been received into our churches after giving proof of the sincerity of their convictions. Many of these have returned to their homes in China; some have gone to colonize missions in the east, while over a thousand remain with us. That some have proved false and brought disgrace upon the cause cannot be denied. Such cases are not unknown in American churches. When a Chinaman goes to the bad everybody hears it. The cases of declension are, after all, very few. Out of eighty new members received into my church during the last three years all but five remain faithful and true. The work is slow, but I am not sure that it is slower than any other department of christian work upon the coast, especially among European foreigners who are not less indifferent to the claims of evangelical religion than are the Chinese.

That many Chinese have been reached and permanently benefitted cannot be seriously denied. To see men who were highbinders becoming peaceable and law-abiding; idolaters becoming intelligent and God-fearing men; gamblers that have been changed into industrious, honest and upright men; opium smokers breaking away from the chains of an enslaving vice; and women once the inmates of the vilest dens of Chinatown, now domestic servants in American homes, or the mothers of christian families training up their children in the paths of religion and virtue, are surely transformations of character that are beyond dispute and are results that no hostile criticism can assail or ignorant ridicule disparage.

It is true that every christian Chinaman does not cut off his queue or adopt American costume. What of that? American residents in China

do not adopt Chinese modes of dress while living in that country and why should the Chinaman adopt ours? As to the queue, it has no more to do with heathenism than George Washington's pigtail or that of our American school-girls. It is really a mark of allegiance to his government, the mark of a loyal subject of the Emperor of China, and in view of the act of Congress that denies him the right of naturalization in this country, his retention of his queue and national dress involves a principle that commands my entire respect. Nor does a Chinaman's sincerity hinge upon what place he chooses to lay his bones. "Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones," and it is no uncommon thing for natives of the eastern states residing among us to make a similar request before death that their bodies shall repose in some ancestral vault on the eastern slope. Yet I have never heard this urged as evidence of their heathenism. As a rule, however, Chinese christians are content to sleep in the christian burial grounds of California. All such objections as these are mere trifles. American tailor, milliner and barber fashions and social conventionalities are no part of christianity, and it is a good thing for christianity they are not. The tests of christian discipleship are laid down in the New Testament and the real question is: Do these Chinese professing christians conform in heart and life to these tests? There are a number of witnesses ready to be called into

court. Dr. B. C. Henry, of Canton, says: "The character of the five thousand christians in Canton will compare favorably with the christians of any land." The late Rev. W. White, who labored amongst the towns to which the Chinese in California belong, wrote a year or two ago to a church paper in the East speaking of "the splendid christian character" of hundreds of these returned emigrants whom he compared to "beacon

lights on mountain tops." A similar testimony is borne by Rev. H. V. Noyes, of Canton, who also says "of the thirteen native assistants who have labored in the Sze Yap districts six were converted in California, one in Australia, and one received his first religious impressions from a christian Chinaman while crossing the Pacific."

Rev. J. C. Nevin of Los Angeles, says: "After an experience of thirty-two years amongst the Chinese both in their own country and here, having seen them convert-

ed; having watched them live the gospel under more trying circumstances than fall to the lot of christians in our own country—having known them out of their slender income contribute liberally to the Lord's cause—having listened to their oftentimes earnest prayers and fervid addresses—having stood by the bedside of the sick and dying—having witnessed the trial and triumph of their faith \* \* \* I can say with the utmost confidence that no greater proof of the power of the gospel to save can be



Lum Foon. Self-supporting Evangelist.

found amongst any people in the world."

The Rev. Ira M. Condit, for twenty-five years a Presbyterian missionary to the Chinese both in China and California writes: "As a rule I have as much faith in the religion of Chinese christian professors as I have in that of our own people. If they are not sincere then our religion is a sham and a delusion."

A lady in Oakland speaks of her Chinese cook as "the best christian in our family, whose integrity and consistency will stand against that of any white christian."

Rev. J. Endicott Gardner of Victoria, B. C., says: "In point of character consistency, zeal and liberality I consider my Chinese church members are on a level with the average members of any church."

Rev. W. S. Holt of the Presbyterian Mission, Portland, says: "I have been among the Chinese in China and the United States for almost nineteen years and am well qualified to judge. I consider the Chinese christians compare favorably with those of any nation in character and fidelity. They readily respond to the demands of benevolence and their gifts are on an average fully equal to those who have been trained in christian lands."

Rev. W. C. Pond, D. D., writes: "One-third of three hundred and thirty-six members of Bethany church of which I am pastor, are Chinese believers. While I joyfully recognize in the American members of my church a steadfastness and devotion I have nowhere seen excelled, I also testify that according to every test of christian character authorized by the Master our Chinese members are their full equals."

As Secretary of the Congregational Chinese mission, Dr. Pond says: "During the last seventeen years eight hundred Chinamen have been admitted to our churches. It is not claimed that none of them were mistaken or even that none of them were conscious hypocrites—we could not

claim that of an equal number of American professors taken at random, but I do affirm that by every practical test of character, by their steadfastness, zeal, honesty, liberality, growing knowledge of the truth and increasing efficiency in teaching the truth to others they give on an average tokens of true conversion as clear as can be found in the christians of any land."

Rev. J. K. McLean, D. D., of Oakland, says he has fifty Chinese members in connection with his church, and they are just as consistent christians as any fifty of his American church members. Rev. Dr. Bovard, presiding elder of the San Francisco district of the M. E. church says: "A close personal acquaintance with many of the Chinese christians in San Francisco for seven years leads me to the conviction that they are truly imbued with the spirit of the gospel. They not only know and accept the doctrines and essentials of christianity, but they give unmistakable evidence of having entered into the power and life of its truths. I have found amongst them such perfect sincerity of heart and transparency of character that could only come from a new heart."

Judge N. G. Curtis of Sacramento whose forensic eloquence has often thrilled our local courts, and whose profession has accustomed him to weigh evidence and read character, is a very valuable witness. Several years ago he had a young Chinaman in his family who became a member of the Presbyterian church. For several years he watched that young man's life very closely. He judged it by the severest New Testament tests. He says he found him devout, upright, honest and true, his spare time being devoted to the study of the Scriptures. The judge's family became much attached to him on account of his singular refinement of character and purity of life. At last he was taken ill. He was nursed with tender care during a lingering sickness borne with christian fortitude. Before he died he expressed a wish that

he might be buried with christian people and that his heathen kinsmen should not be allowed to take his body away. When the missionary came to attend his funeral the judge said: "I have been looking for a model christian life and I have found one in this Chinese lad from across the seas." In Sacramento city cemetery there stands a splendid marble

The *steadfastness* of Chinese christians under persecution is a powerful evidence of the genuineness of their conversion. The popular opinion is that a Chinaman professes christianity for mercenary ends and can change his faith as easily as he changes his coat. It is difficult to discover what temporal gain attaches to the christian profession of a man who finds



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monument that cost over one thousand dollars, erected at the expense of Judge Curtis, bearing the name "Ye Gon Lun," and the words, "He lived and died a christian;" and that costly tomb, the noble testimony engraven there, and the stainless record of that young Chinaman's life are plain, silent, thrilling evidence sufficient to convince the most cynical mind that a Chinaman may become a true christian.

himself cast out of family, clan, guild and employment, cursed as he walks down the street, and counted as the filth and offscouring of the earth. During my nine years' residence in South China, three years of which my mission journeys lay in that part of the province that is the home of the Chinese in America, I have witnessed what terrible persecution these converts have to endure on their return home. I have seen men who, on

announcing their christian faith, have been deserted by parents, wife and brethren; others who have meekly borne bonds and stripes and imprisonment because they would not renounce their faith or cease publicly to teach what their fellow-villagers call "the religion of the foreign devils." I knew a man who was baptized in the Methodist mission in San Francisco who invested his hard-earned savings in a lot of ground. When he began to build his house he refused to consult the oracle, would not call in the Taoist priests with their incantations to drive away the evil spirits. An epidemic of smallpox broke out in the village and was supposed to have been occasioned by the omission of these rites. His fellow villagers threatened him with death, but he refused to make peace with the gods. The poor fellow's house was torn down, his property confiscated, and himself beaten till he dropped down in a state of unconsciousness. I have seen these christian men suffer the looting and destruction of their houses because they would not subscribe to the festival of a heathen god. A small contribution of half a dollar would have spared them pain and annoyance, yet these brave men would suffer joyfully the spoiling of their goods rather than compromise principle and violate conscience. Were these men hypocrites? Did these heroic souls join the church for the sake of temporal gain? Nor are these solitary instances. The Rev. Dr. Henry of Canton says: "There is not a christian in Canton that has not been exposed to reproach, calumny, injustice or physical violence on account of his faith."

The London *Times*, that used to sneer at Chinese missions, has lately published a remarkable leading article on the heroism of the native christians of Szchuen during the recent persecutions. It says, with knock-down logic: "If the motives of christian converts in China are wholly mercenary why should it be necessary

to persecute them so cruelly in order to drive them from a faith which means nothing to them but a little money?"

Let any caviler at Chinese missions read the heartrending accounts of the recent persecutions in China, published by the foreign secular press in that land, and ask himself whether *his* religion would stand such a test. It is not surprising that some shrink from the trial and quail in the presence of danger and death; but hundreds of them have counted it their glory to suffer for righteousness' sake, have sealed the truth with their blood, and have laid down their lives with the courage of martyrs rather than deny the christian faith. These are men of whom this narrow, sordid age is unworthy, whose unselfish heroism puts much of our modern christianity to shame, and the meanest heathen the sun has ever shone upon is the carping critic who, in the face of these martyrdoms, will maintain that a Chinaman cannot become a christian.

Their *liberality* to the church is another evidence of the sincerity of their profession of the christian religion. Taking into account their scanty means and the large part of their income which is sent home for the support of parents and families in China, their liberality is unsurpassed by any body of christians in the world. The Chinese of the Congregational missions—the largest on this coast—last year contributed six thousand two hundred and ninety dollars to the treasury of the mission.

In the Province of Canton, there is a band of native itinerant evangelists, physicians and colporteurs who are going from village to village preaching the gospel, healing the sick and selling christian books, and the whole expense of this mission is borne by the young Chinamen of the Congregational missions of this coast—by men who, we are told, are "irredeemably bad."

The Presbyterian Mission Chinese are equally liberal. Besides contrib-



uting to the expenses of the work here, they are sending generous assistance to the greater work being done in their native towns. Rev. H. V. Noyes, of Canton, writes that he has received one thousand five hundred dollars from California Chinese to build a new church in Canton, besides three hundred dollars towards a chapel in San Ning.

Rev. Ira Condit writes me : "The Chinese prove their religion by their

members of the Methodist Mission Church every year contribute from one thousand five hundred to one thousand eight hundred dollars to the church. They pay their share of all church benevolences, not forgetting the poor, infirm ministers of the conference to whom they give from fifty to seventy dollars every year. Their liberality is shown during the last seven years in gifts to the great Missionary Society that sent them the



Rev. Wong, Presbyterian.

works. The year before last the Presbyterian Chinese of California placed in the hands of trustees in the City of Canton, three thousand two hundred dollars, to be invested as an endowment fund for the support of the ministers of the church. \* \* \* Last year the contributions of our Chinese christians on this coast amounted to two thousand two hundred and thirty-nine dollars."

The one hundred and twenty-five

gospel, amounting to over three thousand five hundred dollars, or about five hundred dollars every year. Not satisfied with this, they have just formed a Missionary Society, like their Congregational brethren, to employ christian workers in their homes, for which purpose they have already raised over one thousand dollars. In the Baptist and Episcopal missions, there is the same spirit of benevolence. There is no space to

tell in detail of the many churches in China that wholly or in part maintain their pastors and places of worship; of Lo Hoy, the wealthy Methodist of Canton, who uses his fortune to pay the salaries of preachers and extend christian work; of Lum Foon, converted in the Methodist mission in San Francisco, who gave up a good business to become a self-supporting missionary in his native city, erecting chapel schools and residence, and presenting them and himself to the church; or of the Chinese cook, who a few months ago placed in my hands a packet containing one hundred dollars, the first money he had saved since he became a christian and which he desired to be sent to aid mission work in China; of the late Tiong Ah Hok, the rich Foochow Methodist, who gave ten thousand dollars to help found the Anglo-Chinese College, in that city; or of his noble and accomplished wife, the daughter of a Mandarin, who spends her life and fortune in charitable work, and who in a recent tour of the world was distressed to think she could not pay her personal respects to the church that had sent her the gospel because the exclusion laws of this christian nation shut her out. Yet we are asked to believe that Chinamen are utterly and "irredeemably bad," and the christians all hypocrites who have joined the church from mercenary motives!

The devotion of these people to their pastors and teachers is another feature of their character. Such prodigality of gratitude and such constancy of friendship were never seen as in the relation of flock to pastor in China. The Rev. Mr. Walley, who has just returned from China, was at Wuhu during the recent riots, and tells how nobly the native christians stood by him and his wife, and risked their lives in their defense, when all their European friends had fled. I know nothing in history or fiction more thrilling than his account of the way these christian Chinamen faced a

raging mob and raging flames to rescue three little English children from a burning mission-house and restored them to the arms of their distracted mother. Ask her if she ever saw a christian Chinaman.

Shall I ever forget that September morning in Canton, eight years ago, when the streets were surging with a desperate mob three thousand strong, yelling, "Down with the foreign devils," when fourteen fine mansions of the foreign merchants were looted and burnt to the ground, the residents only barely succeeding in saving their lives? Deserted by fellow-countrymen, cut off from succor and with death staring us in the face, the only people who befriended me and my family during the long hours of that terrible day were christian Chinamen. It was a member of my church who smuggled us into his house and kept us concealed in a back room. It was a band of christian Chinamen of my church who forced their way through the mob, at the peril of their lives, to make sure of our safety, and who, within sound of the howls of the mob, the roar of the flames and the crack of musketry, stood round us in our defense, vowing that no harm should come to their dear pastor and his family as long as their lives held out. If these men were not christians then that word has no meaning to me.

Of the Chinese christian ministry much might be said in illustration of the capacity of a Chinaman to apprehend and intelligently expound the highest truths of the christian religion. Many of them are cultured gentlemen who have become christian ministers after throwing up more lucrative situations. The preaching of many of them would do credit to any pulpit of christendom. Their sermons, interspersed with apt illustrations, are packed with thought, profoundly exegetical and forcibly logical. Some are orators, others theologians, some practical, while

others bubble over with wit and humor. Blameless in their integrity, fearless in their denunciation of error, and suffering day by day contumely and insult, they seem to have come fresh from the apostolic age. There is the Rev. Kwan Loy, who preached in the market place of Kau Kong, knowing that offers of a reward of five hundred dollars for his head had been posted all over the town. There is Dr. Sia Sek Ong, a graduate of the Imperial University, who threw up a lucrative situation to become a Methodist preacher, itinerating from village to village and preaching the gospel, sometimes upon less than three dollars a month. The author of the prize tract, "Who is Jesus?" a successful pastor and presiding elder and four years ago delegate to the last Methodist General Conference, Dr. Sek Ong, is worthy a place in the highest rank of the Methodist ministry. Among Chinese preachers in California the most brilliant, perhaps, is the Rev. Chan Hon Fan, a man of liberal ideas, a good English scholar and a preacher of singular eloquence and power. No braver thing was ever done in San Francisco than his open attack upon Highbinderism while preaching on the open street of Chinatown a few months ago. On the very spot that a few days before had been reddened with the blood of murder, and under the rooms of a highbinder society the crowd stood for an hour and listened to this brave preacher openly exposing and denouncing the murderous secret societies that had disgraced their nation and terrorized Chinatown. Another noted preacher is the Rev. Tong Keet Hing of the Baptist mission, perhaps the best Biblical scholar and closest thinker in the Chinese church. He has been called the Chinese Spurgeon for his ready wit, his

luminous presentation of truth, and his subtle and searching application. The Rev. Mr. Wong of the Presbyterian mission is a good, practical preacher, whose clear exposition and chaste diction make him a model for younger men. There is Rev. Ng Poon Chiu, who is a good English scholar, reads his Hebrew Bible and Greek Testament and is about to be ordained to the ministry in the Presbyterian church. Mention must be made, too, of Gee Gam, one of the oldest and most respected Chinese christians in California, for twenty years court interpreter at Oakland, who spends his spare time in evangelistic work in connection with the Congregational mission. There is, also, Lee Tong Hay, the Methodist local preacher, whose sermons and addresses, in English and Chinese, are so full of pith and humor that some have called him the Chinese Sam Jones. Many other instances might be given, but these will suffice to show that Chinamen can not only become sincere Christian believers, but also preachers of the gospel as intelligent, faithful, earnest and consecrated as can be found in the pulpits of our own churches.

With these results it surely cannot be seriously maintained that Christian missions among the Chinese are a failure. Year after year these young men of "Far Cathay," who have been under our influence and instruction and have been brought in contact with the religion, science and civilization of the West, are returning to their native land, bearing with them the light of a new age, the principles of free institutions and the seeds of imperishable truth that will be planted in their far-off homes and become a power for good long after our work is done and our name forgotten.

