

PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN CHINA

1807-1907

**Robert Morrison,**  
**THE PIONEER MISSIONARY**

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**L I F E**  
**AND**  
**L A B O U R S**

By

REV. T. W. PEARCE.

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**CENTENARY TRACTS**  
**No. I.**

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ROBERT MORRISON MEMORIAL

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## ROBERT MORRISON

**CENTENARY TRACTS**—This is the first of a series of "Centenary Tracts" on Missions in China, issued by the Canton Missionary Conference. It is one link in a chain uniting the earliest with the latest day's of Missionary endeavour. Protestant Mission's in China date from the arrival at Canton of the pioneer Missionary, Robert Morrison. The following pages do not aim to tell Morrison's story. They are a side light on the man and on his work. They point the moral of his apostolic life for the many who seek at the close of a century of Mission's in China to honour his memory in a Robert Morrison Memorial Building.

**PAST AND PRESENT**—On one of the main highways of the world where West meets East voices from the past of Protestant Missions in China speak in clear helpful tones to the Missionary church of today in all lands. Morrison Manuscripts and a Morrison picture have their places in a Morrison Library at the at the City Hall, Hongkong. This library was the free gift of the Morrison Education Society to the public of the far Eastern colony. Picture and Manuscripts are the starting points of this Pamphlet. They speak to us of life in old Canton at a period (1807-1834) of restricted intercourse, not easy to realise when the whole of China lies open, as it now does, to Missionary enterprise.

**THE HISTORIC PORTRAIT**—It is on record that the original painting of "Morrison translating

the scriptures into Chinese," by the artist Chin-ny, aimed at conjoining "historical delineation with personal portraiture." We know not to what extent the painter succeeded in his design. This may, however, be affirmed of the Morrison portrait—no picture is more widely known in the Missionary world.

Facing as it does, one of the most instructive and inspiring chapters in the New Acts of the Apostles it has quickened the imagination and sympathy of many thousands who pray and labour for the progress and final triumph of the Bible in China

**THE CHINESE MANUSCRIPT NEW TESTAMENT**—To the student of Missions who is accorded the privilege of standing where a hundred years ago Morrison stood, and who from this vantage ground lifts up his eyes on Morrison's mission field, the manuscripts teach more than the portrait. They reveal the Pioneer Missionary at his labours "more abundant" and tell in graphic detail the chief part of a great life story. The Chinese Manuscript New Testament will serve as an illustration. It is the oldest Morrison Manuscript and was copied exactly one hundred years ago (1806) in the British Museum, London, by Morrison and a Chinese named Yeung Sam Tak. Of its 756 folio pages 30 at the beginning were written by Morrison, Chinese characters for the most part formed correctly with a Chinese pencil by the first Protestant Missionary, then in the home land preparing to serve in the Gospel on this far off shore.

**VALUE OF THE MANUSCRIPT AS A MEMORIAL**—Morrison brought this Manuscript with him to

China and made it the basis of his translation of the New Testament. It consists of a Harmony of the Gospels, to which are added the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles in their order down to Hebrews I: 14 where the document ends. Here, plain as on the day when his hand traced them, are the Chinese words written by Morrison as a first contribution to Scripture translation. The Manuscript testifies to Morrison's ardent zeal, the "diligence that never tires" and the "patience that refuses to be conquered" in the service of God and man.

**STRENUOUSNESS THE KEYNOTE OF MORRISON'S LIFE**—From a point of approach in the Portrait and manuscripts Morrison has been seen reaching forth to the crown and flower of his life's work. The steps by which God led him up to his great task may now be traced. Strenuousness was the keynote of his career. Much endeavouring and much enduring, choice gifts of wisdom and foresight were linked in his character with indomitable resolution and indefatigable energy. An inspiration of selection sent such a man to this mission field, where in little more than a quarter of a century his work was done. When God took him the purpose of his Mission call was complete; his service was rounded off; he had finished his course.

**BIOGRAPHICAL**—Robert Morrison was of Scottish descent and was born at Morpeth in the North of England, 5th January, 1782. In childhood he learned from pious parents the truths of that holy religion which was their strength and stay. In early youth he was

brought, after stress and conflict of soul, to rest in Christ for salvation. From that rest and the hope then set before him he was never afterwards moved away. In opening manhood there came to him an o'er-mastering desire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and to do this was from that time Morrison's great aim in life. When once the thought of mission service entered his mind it dwelt there until he became the pioneer protestant Missionary in China. He who had served his father as an apprentice "with an industry that was very commendable" laboured to the higher sphere to which Divine Providence appointed him with singleness of aim and intensity of purpose that render his service an example to all his successors.

**AUTO-BIOGRAPHICAL**—Records from Morrison's own pen tell the story of his inner life. Thus he writes in 1802, when seeking admission to the privileges of study in Hoxton Academy: "Five years ago I was much awakened to a sense of sin..... reflection upon my conduct, because a source of much uneasiness to me..... I was brought to a serious concern about my soul. .... sin became a burden..... It pleased God to reveal His Son in me..... the Lord has been pleased to humble me and prove me..... I have gradually discovered more of the holiness, spirituality and extent of the divine law, and more of my own vileness and unworthiness in the sight of God."

A confession written about the same time is the devout breathing of his pious soul. "When very young I was a companion of the drun-



kard, the sabbath-breaker, the swearer, the proud person, but in these my heart smote me, I had no rest. Then I made learning and books my God—but all are vain! Fatigued with unsuccessful pursuits after happiness and burdened with a sense of guilt, Jesus, thou Son of God, I come to thee that I may be refreshed and my burden removed.”

**THE SECRET OF MISSIONARY SUCCESS**—To judge of Morrison as a Missionary his secret must be known. He saw the Gospel from within. Flesh and blood had not revealed it unto him. It was not by the will of man that the scriptures came through him to the Chinese. In this sacred service he was moved by the Holy Ghost. His many plans for uttering God's redeeming love in China were marked by a skill and wisdom worthy of his object; they were carried out with a courage and faith that rendered him steadfast and constant in the pursuit of this end. His aims were clear, his methods certain. From the sum total of his mission service arises a large claim on the glad and grateful memory of all who today are seeking to extend the kingdom of God.

**SUMMARY.** *Morrison as Translator of the Scriptures*—Scripture translation and revision of translations is an ever recurring necessity in China as in other lands. Nor will the question of a permanent version be settled by native Christian scholars instructed in the original tongues and in the learning of the West. For Biblical study is ever progressive as is also the purifying and Christianizing of language in Mission lands. It is to the praise

of Morrison that he was the first translator, and that he brought to the task “patient endurance of long labour and a reverential awe of misinterpreting God's word.”

*As Philologist*—Progress in Chinese philology by non-Chinese students during the seventy years since Morrison's death has been marked. Yet in this also boasting is excluded where so much remains to be done. For a few years, after its publication, Morrison's dictionary was the chief aid to the acquisition of the Chinese language by Western students. Among other publications were his Grammar and a Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect, the first of its kind. These were the first steps to that portal through which a multitude of Western men and women have since sought to enter this temple of Eastern learning.

*As Founder of an Anglo-Chinese College*—The object of the Anglo-Chinese College, founded by Morrison at Malacca, was declared in the Trust Deed to be the cultivation of English and Chinese literature in order to the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Literature was to be cultivated “as a means of effecting, under the blessing of God's Holy Spirit, the conversion to the faith of Christ of the Extra Ganges nations who read or speak the Chinese language.”

*As Founder of the First Chinese Protestant Church*—Although the conditions of Morrison's life in China rendered the printed page the chief channel of his manifold activity, he also preached and taught the Gospel with living voice. For several years a small group of Christian Chinese, the first fruits unto God

of Protestant Missions, joined with him to worship the Divine Redeemer. The first church met regularly in the house of the first missionary.

**CLOSING SCENES**—The final glimpse of the pioneer Missionary at work is in the congregation of faithful souls, on a Sunday, at the close of July 1834. Morrison, as his custom was, preached in Chinese to the native converts whom he exhorted with peculiar solemnity to be steadfast in the faith. Missionary and people joined in the well known hymn, “Jesus, lover of my soul,” which Morrison had recently translated. During that week, on 1st August, he died. Worn with toil and wasted with sickness, his trust in God was unabated and unshaken. Visions of a nation redeemed from Paganism cheered his spirit as it passed from earth to dwell with God.

**OUR HERITAGE FROM MORRISON**—Well and truly were laid the foundations of the spiritual temple which is “God's building” in China. That temple will not fail to take on new strength and form and beauty as they who labour therein, having the like faith in God and love to men, seek the highest ideals in the like self-sacrificing spirit. Today “workers together with God” are asked to remember the work of Morrison that their prayers and gifts of love may bring nearer the realization of his hopes and further the plans formed a century ago for the universal diffusion of Christianity in the empire and dependencies of China.