

Charles E. Cowman

Missionary Warrior

By

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR -

GREAT VILLAGE CAMPAIGN (Continued)

MARCHING ON THROUGH THE PROVINCES

Charles Cowman was wholly absorbed in the undertaking and his spirit was straitened until it should be accomplished. This pioneer work proved to be much more difficult than he had ever dreamed, but his heart was with the Christless multitudes and self-ease was not permitted to come between them and his responsibility.

The year 1914 was rapidly nearing its close when funds went down to the last penny. Scores of splendid native workers were offering themselves for the Village Campaign. They, too, were longing to plunge into the battle, but an empty treasury was looked into morning after morning. Hard work, heavy responsibility, and the impossibility of any escape from either in the Orient, were telling on his health. The new year began in a semi-breakdown and fearing it would be complete, he left Japan for America expecting to remain a brief time. The short ocean voyage so invigorated him that he was able after a few days to be out in deputation work.

"I feel that GOD is holding me responsible for the thirty million souls in the provinces who are yet unreached," were the words in a letter sent to a prayer-helper.

After a few brief months in the homeland during which he was busy in conventions and campmeetings, traveling thousands of miles, speaking in hundreds of places, he bade farewell to his friends with apparently a buoyant heart, and set out for his field of labor with the air of one leaving a foreign land for a loved and longed for father-land. In a peculiar sense he felt he was going home. His heart and his treasures were far away "near the golden gate of day," and while his affection for his native land had never waned, the new affection which had taken root in his heart for the land of his adoption had been stronger than his attachment to the land of his birth. A friend who accompanied him to the steamer said to him, "Brother Cowman, I fear that you will never come back." His quick reply was, "I do not need to come back."

Leaving the attack on Naples, Gonsolvo, the captain of the besieging band, declared that he would rather die one foot foremost than preserve life with one step of retreat. There are occasions when no other alternative is offered. It may not be necessary that we should live. It is imperative that we should stand firm. The motto of David Livingstone was in these words: "I determined never to stop until I have come to the end and achieved my purpose."

A much loved Chinese proverb was often quoted by our beloved missionary. "If you set out on a

journey of ten miles, remember that nine miles is only half way." Also a Tibetan proverb, "As you go forth to the fight be in the front; as you return be the last to come." He returned to his task with unabated diligence. A man of his nature could not go slow. The doctor was anxious about him. "Charles Cowman is burning away," he said, "and he has no fuel, but it does no good to blame him, he could not help it with a fire in his bones for perishing souls."

If we could forget what we know of the lands and the people where the evil one reigns, we might for a time live in a dream-world, but having once known even a part of the woe of the sin-cursed world, we never can forget again, until its redemption is complete in its finished workings, as well as in its Divine plan. But they are there and they are our brothers and sisters, left to our care and love by One who loved them and us even unto death.

Instead of making the fact of his being leader an excuse for considering his own comfort and health, it was the very opposite, and he felt that he must remain at his post of duty even if it meant the loss of all. Often he quoted. "**Whosoever will save his life shall lose it.**" He had very strong views about a missionary's duty to his work.

He started out in the new year with the thought deeply implanted in his heart that if the Village Bands could be increased to one hundred workers, (ten new missionaries and ninety native workers), the entire work could be completed in one year.

The dying words of a missionary veteran were, "It is my deep conviction and I say it again and again that if the church of CHRIST were what she ought to be, twenty years would not pass by till the story of the Cross was uttered in the ears of every living man." If this veteran had a vision of twenty years for the evangelization of the entire world. then why not touch every home in Japan in one year, was his argument.

He prayed, "Lord, send laborers, send us one hundred men," and in a remarkable manner that prayer was answered, for almost immediately ten splendid young men in America came forward offering themselves for this particular work, also ninety native workers. These were accepted. and during the year that followed they were engaged in the most intense activity out in the villages of Japan."

What an object lesson to the native Christians these young missionaries were, in their willingness to endure hardships, in their zeal, in their deep interest in souls! How persistently they pressed their way through rice plains, over mountains, wading rivers and swollen streams, in the dead heat of the summer and the piercing cold of the winter, for CHRIST counting everything but loss. The millions were hearing and responding to the Gospel message.

Think of the progress made in Paul's day! If the pace established in his day had been continued, the world would have been evangelized long ago. Paul never pitied himself from the moment he got the vision; there was no more love of ease, for the passion seized him and whether in shipwreck, under the lash, or in prison, the love of CHRIST constrained him, and passion for souls pulled him on. It is a continual drinking in of this compassion in the fulness of the HOLY SPIRIT that keeps one's life a living sacrifice, a constantly burning flame.

Requests came from several parts of the world for a story of the Village Campaign as to its

inception, progress, faith aspect, and results, as it had become quite well known. It was talked of in pulpits, in campmeetings, and by firesides, and people wished to hear more, but Charles Cowman was too busy to make notes of what he was doing. The record of the Great Village Campaign would make a thrilling volume of answered prayer, and we trust that some day time will be given for writing such a volume.

A note in his diary at sea enroute to Japan, his last voyage there, reads, "I have resolved by GOD's grace, never to untie my loins, but keep them girded until I hear my Master's call, **'My heart is fixed, O GOD.'**"

"Think not of rest; though dreams be sweet,
Start up and ply your Heavenward feet.
Is not GOD's oath upon your head?
Ne'er to slink back on slothful bed.
Never again your loins untie,
Nor let your torches waste and die.
Till, when the shadows thickest fall.
Ye hear your Master's midnight call."

He worked rapidly and finished a magnificent course in holy haste, as if under a presentiment that he must crowd much into a brief space.

A small booklet was sent out to praying friends bearing the title, "*Thirty Million People to be Evangelized during 1916.*"

"An unprecedented opportunity lies just before us. Our Great Village Campaign Bands during the past two and a half years, have reached almost ONE HALF of the fifty-eight millions of people of Japan, going from house-to-house with the Gospel message.

"THOUSANDS of souls have been won to JESUS by these workers as they have spoken with them **'by the way.'** After tramping all day to the homes, with great packs of Gospel Portions on their backs, and coming in to their lodgings at night-fall, weary and foot-sore, they have preached on the streets of their village and labored with earnest seekers, often until midnight. Then, retiring to get a few hours sleep and rest (on the hard floor - no beds), they were roused at early dawn by seeking souls, ere they started to repeat the work of another day.

"EIGHT THOUSAND letters have already been received at our Tokyo office, from other seeking souls, desiring to know more of 'this way.'

"NEVER before in the history of Foreign-Missions, has such a stupendous effort been put forth - to evangelize a whole nation of people, individually, but the very fact that our bands of evangelists have already reached almost half of Japan in such a brief period of time, only proves it CAN BE DONE, and by the grace of GOD and help of His people, we mean to do it."

The dream of Charles Cowman was being realized. One hundred workers were scattered about in the villages and neglected districts of the Island Empire.

Can the reader grasp the full meaning of that sentence? One hundred at work every day from early morning till long into the night, scattering precious seed by the wayside, winning souls by the hundreds, yea, thousands. Eternity alone will reveal the vast number who were brought out of darkness into light.

It was then that his resourcefulness, generalship, and persistence were made manifest. He wished to be at the front with the workers, and in the springtime of 1917, a temporary headquarters was established in the large Island of Kyushu. Nine million souls were there to be reached and with full assurance that GOD was in the front, the distribution of the Scriptures in this island began.

How often do people fancy that the way of the heroic man is all peace and pleasure, but what a mistaken idea. From first to last there is the battle with obstacles, blockades, and other adverse conditions. "The hero is not fed on sweets." Envy no man his place. His well-earned success has been paid for with tears and with blood. The missionary's life! Ah! an archangel would come down from his throne if he might, and feel himself honored to give up the felicities of Heaven for the toil of a missionary's life!

Charles Cowman was often heard to remark, "Oh, how I wish that I never had to leave the field again. How I would love to live and spend the rest of my days among this needy people."

To another prayer-partner he wrote:

"We have entered the fourth year of the Village Campaign and this morning, remembering all the way the Lord has led us, I was moved to tears which could not be suppressed. They were tears of joy and thankfulness to our wonder-working GOD. **'What hath GOD wrought!'** How I thank Him that He has given grace for these heavy years. The evangelization of the world is our Lord's dearest purpose and He will not fail to supply us with resources as we co-operate with Him. GOD Himself is with us and He will not fail. I never took hold of the work with more faith, with unshaken confidence of success, than at this time, and I never saw the Arm of the Lord made so bare. JESUS shall reign."

"Refreshing news was received this morning from the village evangelists. The distribution work in twelve more large counties has been completed. While summing up the number of seekers the figures startled me. I read, 'We have seen more than four hundred souls seeking CHRIST during the past thirty days.' This alone compensates for all the scoffs and jeers of those who said, 'It cannot be done' and 'It will not pay.'

"Compare this sort of evangelizing with hammering away weekly at Gospel-hardened people who have as much made up their minds to reject CHRIST as did Chorazin and Bethsaida!"

Four months later he wrote to homeland friends:

"It is with very grateful hearts and deepest thanksgiving and praise to GOD that we are able to tell you that the nine million precious souls who reside in the Island of Kyushu have been reached. **'Unto Him be glory... world without end.'** The work has been done by twelve missionaries and fifty native brethren who have marched through the land, their faces set like a flint in fulfilling the last commission. all classes have been reached, the high and low; coolies,

college professors, heathen priests, merchants, and most of all, the splendid student class.

"One of the most pathetic stories we have heard in a long time was told us by one of the missionaries. He was out in the mountains searching out the little huts and homes scattered over them, when he came to a group of houses off by itself. Each home was visited, the Gospel booklet presented, when he discovered a cage or prison in one corner of a garden. It was built of poles and peering through the bars was a fine looking young man. He held out his hand and a Scripture portion was given to him. Our missionary brother started down the mountain, the young man calling after him as far as he could hear, 'Arigato, Arigato' (Thank you, thank you). This so touched our brother's heart that he began to pray earnestly for this young man who was evidently suffering mentally. As there are no asylums in these far-off country places the distressed parents had erected this cage in a garden near their house in which to keep him from doing violence to others.

"It was learned that he had been confined to this place for six years. Other mountain homes were visited and the missionary returned again after a time to the roadway near which this unfortunate man was in prison. He heard a voice as if in prayer. The young man had read the portions, its truth had taken hold upon him and he was calling upon GOD at the very top of his voice. It was now growing dark and our missionary fearing he would lose his way started down the mountain; on and on he went but still he heard the man praying louder and louder. The night grew still, the foot of the mountain was reached but echoing down through the cliffs was the sound of the man still at prayer. Oh the marvelous power of the Name of JESUS which can break every fetter and set the captives free."

Two weeks later he wrote again:

"Seventy-eight men are now engaged in the Great Village Campaign. These faithful bands of young men are walking to about 20,000 homes daily so that every day means another 100,000 souls have the 'Word of this Life,' which Peter also was commissioned to proclaim. Acts 5:20.

"Every member of our Bands is keenly alive to the urgency of the work. Although many of the provinces are very mountainous and difficult, they are marching on victoriously with the great object in view - to complete the work by Christmas. Hundreds of seekers have been the result.

"Although the work has extended over the best part of five years, yet the amount accomplished during the past year since we have had the means for the large force of men at work, has been remarkable. The ten, sometimes twelve missionaries and their bands of Japanese helpers have gone over almost half of the Empire during the year, walking over 50,000 miles equal to twice around the world, over mountain paths and muddy rice fields in all kinds of weather. It has not been easy on the physical, but we have proved how simple is the task set the church in the last great commission of JESUS CHRIST, to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.

"On July 3, the village Bands began their exodus from the Island of Kyushu, forty-seven of the number going to the extreme northern part of Japan, the great Island of Hokkaido, away up near Russia. We arranged with the railroad officials for a whole coach for the party. They were two nights and a day journeying to Tokyo and although very worn on arrival, we are sure that all

along the line they fulfilled the Word, '**As ye go, preach.**' There were song services and testimony meetings on the train and one of the missionaries said: 'We had a gloriously good time even though the seats were hard boards and we had to sit up all the way.' The Hokkaido Band stopped a day and a night in Tokyo and then resumed their journey to the far north, another day and night's journey by train and boat.

"They were re-enforced there by some splendid Christian young men. Two of the number are sons of a blind preacher, others are from our thrifty mission stations in the far northland. The work has had a good beginning, and we fully expect that the two million souls of Hokkaido will have had 'the Gospel as a witness' ere this issue of the Standard reaches you.

"The other bands are hard at work on the mainland, the dear faithful men not counting their lives dear unto themselves that they might fulfil the ministry given to them by the Lord Himself.

"As the work progresses, we are more and more convinced of the power of the Word of GOD. We need have no anxious thought as to its outcome. Ours is to sow the seed, the Lord of the harvest brings it forth to full fruition. We are seeing results, marvelous indeed. From seven to eight orders a day for Bibles come from out-lying districts where the village bands have been distributing the Scriptures. Today a letter came from a young man in a far-off lone village saying, 'I received a Scripture Portion and it was the first time I ever heard that there was a true and living GOD. I want Him, lead me to Him.' Another writes, 'I received a Scripture Portion and read the wonderful words which led me straight to him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.'

"Yes, right in this time with the thunders of war rolling all around, GOD's tender voice is speaking peace, sweet peace, His gift to the lost and sinning world and men are finding Him. We feel more determined than ever to spend the last hour of our earthly day in scattering the Word of GOD to the heathen world-scattering it broadcast into village, town, and city with every ounce of strength we possess. Little wonder that the devil hates and fights us inch by inch for he, too, knows and trembles at the power of the Word.

"They tell us that the last words spoken by the dying soldier boys on the battle fields are words from the Book of Life.

"We read of Cromwell and his Puritan warriors in the midst of one of their fiercest battles, stopping long enough to read the 117th Psalm; and John Huss, dying at the stake, choked by flames, repeating with his last breath the words used by CHRIST when He hung upon the Cross. '**Into thy hands I commend my Spirit**'; and Savonarola on the night before his death, with his left arm broken and his shoulder pulled from its socket by his tormentors, falling asleep repeating, '**the LORD is my Light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?**'; and brave Martin Luther in one of the dark hours of struggles for right and truth said to Melancthon, 'Come Philip, let us sing the 46th Psalm, '**A mighty fortress is our God.**'

"Ah, those old saints and martyrs knew the power of the Word of GOD and we missionaries are getting visions too of old heathen temples transformed into chapels and churches, of heathen homes and heathen communities transformed by '**the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.**'"

A few weeks later he wrote again to dear homeland friends:

"From snow-capped Fuji to coral-reefed Loa Choo, the neglected peoples are coming, coming in by the hundreds to the Saviour who died for them. Thirty workers are in Hokkaido among the three million there, seventy of the campaign band are scattered about on the mainland. We have proved beyond a doubt that the pure, unmixed Gospel-message, accompanied with faith and prayer, makes converts anywhere and everywhere, and that in the most unlikely places and districts, where idolatry has held undisputed sway for centuries, resisting all attempts at uprooting, the sweet story of the Cross of CHRIST has proved equal to its displacement. Another very noticeable thing: the greatest success has not been attained by the greatest of our native preachers. It has not been the fruit of skilled labor. The simple story told in a simple manner has brought the hundreds to the feet of JESUS."

How could the work help but develop and increase born in the soul travail of a man who had seen a vision and had paid the price of his dream! The months that followed after his return to Japan were very busy ones and were perhaps the most critical, yet the most fruitful of his life on the field.

One of the greatest tests during the Village Campaign was met during this time.

The treasury again became completely depleted. One hundred men were out campaigning. "No funds" were the words in a wire from Tokyo. "**Lord, to whom shall we go?**" was often upon his lips. Where? To his never-failing Friend. To the One Who had said to him twenty-five years before, "**Go ye also into the vineyard and whatsoever is right I will give you.**" Yes, to the One who said, "**Go ye . . . to every creature**" and he had gone. Could GOD fail Him? Perish the very thought!

Telegrams were sent to each leader of the bands informing them of the test and on Sunday morning they gathered their native workers about them and made the need known. Some went to the mountains where they could be quite alone, others remained in their rooms in the native inns to wrestle and prevail. On Monday morning a note of victory was received from each leader. "We prayed through" wrote one. "GOD gave us assurance" wrote another. Charles Cowman had spent the night alone with his Lord, but there had been no wrestling. A deep settled peace stole into his heart and an assurance came that prayer was heard and the answer was on the way.

How often was he heard to remark, "Let us take the promises to mean just what they say; let us look into His marred face and commit ourselves unreservedly to Him and let us do it now, right now. Why do we delay? Then let us expect a response, and go forth quickly to put it into use in our every day life."

A favorite promise was, My people "**shalt not be put to shame.**" It held good at this particular time. Monday morning arrived when a wire from Tokyo conveyed the joyful news, "Dr. Blackstone has cabled \$8,000.00 for the Village Campaign."

What a doxology of praise rose from grateful hearts for His unfailing love! He had not moved too late behind the scenes. GOD's little ones, here and there over the world were moved to send

their humble gifts and the treasury was replenished like the barrel of meal that wasted not, and the work went on.

His most trying fight was not over funds, but with ill health. Through what pain and weariness were gathered the gems for his crown. He was making a desperate fight with physical weakness and loving friends in the homeland knowing about it were writing, "Come home and take a good, long, well-earned rest," but he was gazing into the homes where precious souls were living and dying in the dark. He thought he saw a Hand guiding him to those lowly homes and he followed the gleam.

How often during those days he sang the Christian's bracing battle hymns. "Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war," and "Soldiers of CHRIST, arise and gird your armour on." Like David, he "**encouraged himself in the Lord**" and marched forward. How often he said, "CHRIST can scatter the darkness, if His children with kindled torches shall speed forth."

"The idle man does not count in the plan of the Campaign. Let us not be too careful of the physical man," were the words he wrote to a relative. A few sentences in the same letter were "Put yourself in my place for one brief day, come close to the heart of heathendom, see and feel their deep need, and then see what your answer will be. How can I do otherwise than what I am doing? If strength fails, if life itself goes out, I shall fail where I am, and feel that I have paid my debt, and how great is that debt. I must pay it to the full with the last ounce of my blood."

"The dead have been awakened - shall I sleep?
The harvest's ripe - and shall I pause to reap?
I slumber not - the thorn is in my couch.
Each day a trumpet soundeth in mine ear,
Its echo in my heart."

Rest? Settle down in the homeland? Impossible for such a man as Charles Cowman, but he was so cheerful always, so happy, that it was difficult for anyone to believe that he was overworking; yet in my heart there were misgivings as to how the end would come. He loved his work so dearly, loved the people, and there was such a joy in serving the Master that it fairly radiated from him.

Often we were away together on trips and at these times we were quite alone, a rare experience for us; and then, without interruptions, in the sequestered domain of some native inn, he would admit me into the wonderland of his inner hopes, his plans for the extension of the work, his ideas about the evangelization of the Oriental peoples. Ever I looked forward to such times as one might look forward to an excursion into some new unexpected transport of existence, for he always had new plans and wonderful things upon his heart to reveal in these byways we explored together.

These were the hours that one puts away in the secret chamber of unwritten and untold feeling.

The burden of souls was ever with him and he never slipped from beneath it for one moment and it remained with him to the very end of his day.

It happened on a Sunday morning when we were far up in the mountains with our village workers. Suddenly he said to me, "I feel very ill." A doctor was hastily summoned and after a thorough examination said, "You had better stop right now and return to the homeland." The heart was ceasing to function properly. There was no one to take his place and he believed that with care he might be able to continue a few weeks longer. A passage of Scripture made a strange impression upon him at this time (Zechariah 4:9). **"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it."** His own name seemed to be written in this text. It came to him that day radiant with light. The words were like a diamond flash.

The fresh mountain air seemed for a time to invigorate him. There was new vitality and he continued to work, but little bits in his private diary written for no eyes but his own, told of some inner battles.

August 15. "Experienced a strange pain in my heart in the night, but prayed and it left me. I can see no place to stop in the work."

August 20. "Fight on my soul till death. GOD grant that I may see my Pilot face to face, when I have crossed the bar."

"How oft at the touch of that nail-scarred palm,
My storm-troubled soul has at once grown calm.
The tempest that surges I will not fear,
For how can I sink if that Hand is near."

And the next day he said to me, "It will be so wonderful to look into the face of CHRIST. To see the same Face that we have seen throughout all our earthly pilgrimage, the CHRIST with whom we have grown so sacredly familiar out here during these twenty years. He will be the very One who will meet us when we Cross the boundary line."

Beautiful life, lived to the glory of GOD!

And the task of us who are left is to shape the issues of these days that the sacrifice of such a man may yet seem to have been right.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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