

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

The Centenary of Timothy Richard.

BROWNING wrote a poem called "Parleyings with certain people of Importance in their day," but it is safe to say most of these were virtually unknown in our day. That is not the case on the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Timothy Richard. Most men serve their generation and are soon forgotten. Here and there a man stands out and leaves a name that abides. Richard was one of these and his life and work are worthy of celebration. He holds a place beside that of William Carey and the fame of both men far exceeds the boundary of any one society or church. Richard had the heart of a child, the vision of a prophet, and the soul of a poet. With that candid expression some men retain to the end of their days, he kept a rare internal simplicity of heart and integrity of soul. He believed a disposition of good existed in all men, and he instinctively drew out the best in men of every creed and race, and in his presence mean and unworthy thoughts withered away.

Richard was born in a small village in Wales in 1845, and in 1865 he entered Haverford West College. One incident in his college course indicated the sort of man he was to become. He headed a demand for a more modern curriculum, feeling that the studies then given were 200 years behind the times. The demand was granted, and courses on modern history and science were added, but when, fifteen years later, Richard returned from China, he found these studies had been discarded in favour of the old course. All his life Richard endeavoured to discover the methods most fruitful in results, rather than to adhere to the time-honoured ones not adjusted to modern needs.

In February, 1870, Richard began his career as a missionary under the B.M.S. in China, and laboured there for forty-five years. He was not the first B.M.S. missionary in China, but he was the first to take the message to the Interior. For some five years he resided in Chefoo, and from that place made many itinerations into the interior, often meeting with danger and opposition. Not seldom he was refused accommodation in the inns, but gradually his good humour gained him a hearing. He found the conventional method of preaching in street chapels unproductive, and he adopted as his ruling principle our Lord's counsel "to seek out those that were worthy," i.e., men who were not far from the Kingdom of God, and who hungered for something better than

their own religions offered. In such men he found the "good ground" in which to sow the seed. Richard had the great gift of making contacts with individuals, and when he had won these he wisely left them to spread the truth to others.

By 1874 Richard was the sole survivor of the original band of missionaries, and finding a Treaty Port a bad centre for missionary work, he began to seek new territory. After enquiry he chose the ancient city of Tsingchowfu in the heart of Shantung Province, and eight days' travel from Chefoo. Round that place there were several of the secret sects with which the country is honeycombed, and amongst their leaders were many earnest men seeking the truth. It was a district prepared by the Spirit for the reception of the gospel. From the leaders in these sects came some of the most stalwart Christians. So Richard settled in Tsingchowfu and became the founder of the church in Shantung and later of that in Shansi.

In those pioneer days the missionary had to face hostility and obloquy, and only a man of ardent faith could have succeeded. Foreign dress scared the people away, and so Richard shaved his head and adopted Chinese clothes, whereupon the people exclaimed, "Ah, he looks like a man now!" This method was carried on by our missionaries for thirty years, till it finally proved needless.

Richard at once began to study all the Chinese books on religion that he could set his hand on, and prepared a catechism for enquirers which is used to this day.

In the years 1876 to 78 occurred the worst famine China has ever known. Fifteen millions perished. The sufferings of the people struck horror into the heart of Richard, and he did all man could do to save life. There was indignation against the officials for their failure to provide food, and twice Richard was asked to head a rebellion, which, of course, he refused to do.

Richard noted that the Chinese had a way of their own for the propagation of doctrine. He followed a similar course, and created a self-governing and self-supporting church in order to make Christianity truly indigenous. He aimed to present the new religion as something superior to anything the people possessed.

The coming of A. G. Jones in 1876 was a great event and cheered Richard. When, in 1877, the famine in Shansi became far worse than in Shantung, Richard left the care of the young church in the hands of Jones, and set out for Shansi, where at first alone, and afterwards with the help of David Hill and others, he did relief work on a grand scale. Richard sought the co-operation of the officials and of the Roman Catholics, and he pressed on the authorities the need not merely of relief but of preventive measures to avert future famines. It was from this time that Richard became a household name in China.

In 1875 Richard was married, and his wife became a real helpmate in all his work. She was an accomplished lady and wrote biographies of great Christians in ten volumes, and works on Chinese and Western music.

Here let Richard tell in his own words the story of the baptism of the first Christians in 1876. They were a weaver and his wife, and were the first members of the Shantung church. Here is the story: "Now, as baptism by immersion was a most unusual rite in China, I did not know how the people would regard it, so I took the two outside the West Gate, where there was a clear stream running and no house near except a small Buddhist temple. I called on the priest and explained to him the meaning of the ceremony, and asked if he would lend me a room or two in the temple for our use. He readily consented, and I took the couple out in the stream and baptised them, after which we changed our garments in the temple." The next year fifteen more were baptised in a baptistery which Richard had built in his own courtyard, and to prevent any evil reports from spreading he asked his friend, the Prefectural Treasurer, if he would like to be present. He accepted the invitation, and his presence there was sufficient guarantee to the public that everything done was right and proper. I mention these two instances out of many that could be given to illustrate Richard's genius for making friends, and his innate courtesy and resourcefulness.

As showing his breadth of mind and willingness to learn from others, it may be told that Richard secured a complete set of Roman and Greek Church Chinese Christian books, written by the Jesuits and others more than two centuries before. These books had won many converts from the highest classes, and Richard found that, if certain Papist elements were omitted, they could be used with excellent results, for at that time very few suitable Protestant books existed suitable for giving to intelligent Chinese. Most of the missionary tracts violently attacked idolatry and ancestral worship, and such denunciations led to anti-missionary riots, not because of the wickedness of the Chinese, but because the tract-writers had not yet sympathetically studied Chinese ideas, and charged the people with sin where there was no sin. This alienated a large number of Chinese and defeated the very end the writers had in view. It must be remembered that in those days the study of Comparative Religions was in its infancy and was suspect by many of the missionaries.

In Shansi, after the famine, Richard continued to work among officials and scholars as well as among the humbler classes. He gave popular lectures showing how the forces of God in nature could be used for the benefit of men, as in the opening of mines, the building of railways, etc. To equip him for this work Richard,

by means of a legacy he received, spent £1,000 on books and instruments, and on his first furlough himself took classes in S. Kensington on Electrical Engineering. Immediate response was slight, but seed then sown bore fruit in later years. No man has done more than Richard in dispelling the ignorance and prejudice then rampant in the land. In all this he was a voice in the wilderness, and a man far in advance of his times. What is now commonly accepted was then strange, and like all idealists and prophets, Richard encountered no little opposition from his fellow-missionaries. This led to such friction that he finally left Shansi.

The well-known Whitewright Institute in Tsinan is one practical fruit of Richard's ideas. It is unique on the mission field and has done much to awaken the minds of the people. It was inspired by Richard and realises his ideas.

Richard's first furlough was not taken till 1885, when he had been fifteen years on the field. He made a speech in Exeter Hall which marked an epoch in missionary thinking and led one Christian paper to declare that the emphasis in Christian missions had changed. Formerly the chief stress had been laid upon saving the heathen from the sufferings of hell in the next world; now missions existed also to save the heathen from the hell of suffering in this world.

But Richard met with little response from the Home Committee. He was before his times. His work among the literati was approved, but his plea for higher Christian education was turned down, and had to wait for twenty years before it could be carried into effect.

It was during this furlough that I first met Richard. I was then a student in Bristol College, and already dedicated to China. I was twenty-one years junior to Richard, and fell under his spell, and till the end of his life was his admirer and friend. It is useless therefore to look to me for a detached and critical estimate of the man. I did not always share his views, but I always knew him to be a man of God. It was his personality even more than all his varied work which was his greatest contribution to China. I next met Richard in 1892 when I first went to China. He was then living in Shanghai as Director of the Christian Literature Society. After the troubled years in Shansi Richard had found congenial work, and for thirty years he did an amazing amount of translation which put all missions in his debt, and prepared the ground for the New China of to-day. Eventually he gathered round him a band of scholarly and able men to be his helpers. With the prestige of Richard's name, and under his guidance and inspiration, the C.L.S. has made a great contribution to the enlightenment of the Chinese. Richard was associated with the Reformers of 1898, many of whom became martyrs in the cause

of liberty, and one of whom said as he was led to execution, "I am willing to shed my blood if thereby my country may be saved. For every one that perishes to-day a thousand will arise to carry on the work of Reform." This prophecy has been fulfilled.

After the massacre of the missionaries in Shansi Richard was invited to assist in the settlement. He declared the lives of the missionaries should not be sold for money, but that as a great crime had been committed which no government could overlook, he proposed that a fine of half-a-million taels should be imposed, and that this money should be devoted to the founding of a Western University in Taiyuanfu to remove the ignorance which was the root cause of the Boxer Outrages. This scheme was accepted, and Richard was the first Chancellor of the new university, and held control for ten years, after which it was handed over to the Chinese Government. Though Christian theology was not taught in the institution, there were abundant opportunities for showing the beneficent results of Christianity, and Sunday services were held and missionaries were free to work among the students.

Richard was present at the great Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, and urged the need of high-class Christian literature, pointing out that the strength of a chain was in its weakest link, and that the weakest link in missionary effort in China was good Christian literature. No one did more than Richard himself to remedy this defect.

Richard spent much time in visiting temples and interviewing priests and abbots, and on one occasion he went to some famous monasteries near Tsingtao. Here is an episode which is best told in his own words. We saw the old missionary next day, and this is what he told us. "After getting the information I needed, I enquired about the quickest way of returning to Tsingtao, as I wished to avoid the toilsome way in the heat by which I had come over the mountain tracks. I was told that rafts laden with straw often went across the bay with the tide. We went down to the harbour and arranged that the raftsmen should take me that night. The cook provided me with some bread, and we made our way to the shore. The raft was laden with a huge stack of brushwood and straw, between twenty and thirty feet high. I climbed part of the way up by a ladder and clambered the rest of the way by means of a rope. From the top I had a fine view of sea and sky and a soft bed. I spent the night perched on the top of the stack beneath the stars. By dawn next day I was in Tsingtao after a delightful sleep and a calm voyage. Indeed, I was so pleased with the ease and comfort of my voyage that I gave the men more than they had bargained for, at which they were well content." One loves this picture of the veteran missionary at sea on a haycock!

I must give one further story of a final visit paid by Richard to Tsingchowfu shortly before his retirement. He stayed with us, and his presence was a benediction. A demonstration was spontaneously arranged for him in the church, which was packed with a thousand people. Flags waved, trumpets sounded, drums were beaten, and an original poem was recited in his honour, and he received a tremendous ovation from men of all creeds. But what the old man loved best was to roam about the scenes of his early labours and ruminates on the many signs of progress.

After forty-five years of active service Richard retired, and devoted the rest of his life to the promotion of world peace. I saw him a few weeks before his death when he was preparing to return to China. So passed a very great missionary statesman, and a most lovable personality, revered by all who knew him, although they could not always adopt his schemes or endorse his theology. Whatsoever things were true, whatsoever things were honest, whatsoever things were pure, lovely and of good report, these things Richard embodied in his life. No doubt he had his limitations, like other men, but he has left a great memory which still inspires the present generation. "Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams," and many of Timothy Richard's visions have come true, and his dreams have been realised.

E. W. BURT.