

THE SUNDAY AT HOME

O DAY MOST CALM, MOST BRIGHT! . . .
THE WEEK WERE DARK BUT FOR THY LIGHT.—*Herbert.*



"THE WAITING TIME IS PAST, THE SKIES
BREAK GLORIOUSLY ABOVE THY HEAD."

JAMES GILMOUR OF MONGOLIA.

I.

THE nineteenth century has been remarkable in the history of the Christian Church for the growth and expansion during its successive decades of missionary enterprise. The organizations which at its commencement were in their infancy have become great and powerful societies, counting their adherents and converts by myriads, their consecrated evangelizing agents by hundreds, and their income for the purpose of fulfilling the Saviour's Great Commission by hundreds of thousands of pounds. And one of the most encouraging signs in the present condition of English religious life is the earnest and decided forward movement of several of the leading evangelical missionary agencies.

The roll of Christian heroism has been greatly lengthened during the century, and the Christian Church has been enriched for all time by the faith, devotion, and achievements of a host of faithful men and women who have lived and died to plant the standard of the Cross in those dark places of heathenism and cruelty where Satan has far too long held his seat. To the devout Christian mind and heart, Fiji, New Guinea, Travancore, Tinnivelly, Hankow, Mongolia are names as stimulating to faith in the presence and working of the Spirit of God in the lives and hearts of men as Joppa, Antioch, Iconium, and Philippi.

And when the Christian hero-roll of the nineteenth century is complete, no name will be more worthy of a place there than that of James Gilmour. Judged by some standards, often and most fallaciously applied to missionary labour, his work might appear wanting. There is as yet no long list of converts. There are no records of whole Mongol encampments casting away their ancient Buddhistic faith and practice, and beginning to follow the doctrines and teachings of what they call "the Jesus book." Nothing could well be less sensational than his work and the methods by which he pursued it. And if the numbers openly gathered into the fold of Christ are the only test by which to settle the disciple's place on the roll of honour, then it is doubtful whether the name of James Gilmour should appear there at all.

But we judge that another and an altogether different standard is the true test to apply to the Christian hero. To some the Saviour gives a rich and abundant harvest; from others He almost withholds even the harbingers of the coming blessing. But from all He expects, in all He blesses, the one great act of self-denial, the complete and perfect surrender of every purpose, desire, possession, and opportunity to His own loving will. "The disciple is not above his Master. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master." "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." In this hard school,

and tried by this severe test, James Gilmour has had no superior.

By the courtesy of the editor of the *SUNDAY AT HOME*, the writer is enabled to adduce evidence in support of what may seem to some a bold contention from the forthcoming life of James Gilmour.¹ Evidence is there set forth of such a character that it can hardly fail to make upon the mind of the reader the impression which James Gilmour made upon all who had the privilege of his friendship, or who were brought into any close and direct contact with him—that he was mind and heart and soul wholly consecrated to Jesus Christ, and willing to spend himself fully and freely for His sake on behalf of all men, but especially for the unresponsive and unyielding Mongols. If the choice of a hard and barren field, if the ready descent to a low level of civilisation, if the voluntary surrender of earthly prospects, if the daily and hourly crucifixion of self on behalf of the thankless and the evil, if the placing upon the altar of service to Christ and through Him of service of man of one's all—health, time, money, strength, affections, life—if these things and all that they involve are true qualifications for the high places in the school of Jesus Christ, then we claim them all for James Gilmour. He would have been the last to have claimed them for himself. But it strengthens our faith, it rekindles the flame of our love to the same Saviour, it deepens our consecration to the service of man, it intensifies our enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel, it increases our certainty of the final triumph of Christ's kingdom, to enter into the full knowledge of a life and a work like his.

James Gilmour came of a good stock. He was trained in a devout, thrifty, God-fearing Scotch home. His family attended Dr. Wardlaw's Congregational Church in Glasgow, and walked every Sunday five miles each way in order to attend the services. As a child he learned much at his mother's knee, and on the Sunday evenings the old family Bible, Scott and Henry's, was read and explained by his father. At school he soon displayed that remarkable acquisitive ability which enabled him in later years so soon and so perfectly to acquire the Mongolian and the Chinese colloquial languages. After a very successful course at the Glasgow High School, he passed through Glasgow University with considerable distinction, taking many prizes, and laying thus a solid and serviceable educational foundation for the later labour of life. He spent the session of 1865 and 1866 in a course of study at the Theological Hall of the Congregational Church in Edinburgh; and upon offering himself

¹ "James Gilmour of Mongolia. His Diaries, Letters and Reports, edited and arranged by Richard Lovett, M.A. With three portraits and illustrations." Religious Tract Society, 1892.

for service to the London Missionary Society, he was by them transferred to Cheshunt College, where he spent two sessions, from September, 1867, until June, 1869.

It was at Cheshunt College that the writer's friendship with James Gilmour began. He was then in the prime of his early manhood, in the full possession of physical and intellectual vigour, and his soul was aflame with love to the Saviour and to the perishing heathen. He retained, moreover, the love of fun, the high spirits, the keen enjoyment of a good joke, and the constant readiness for an argument upon any subject under the sun which had endeared him to his comrades in Glasgow. Every Cheshunt man of that day readily recalls, and rejoices as he does so, the memory of his good-natured practical joking, of his racy and pointed speeches upon all momentous "house questions," of his power as a reciter, and of his glowing personal piety. To know him even slightly was to respect him; and to enter at all into sympathy with him was to love him as long as life lasted.

One who knew him very intimately at this period thus records his impressions:

"At no time during his residence at Cheshunt could there have been any doubt as to Gilmour's piety or consecration to the great work of his future; but during the second year it must have been manifest to all who knew him intimately that there was a deepening and broadening of his spiritual life. As I look back over the interval of years I can see that it was then he began to reach the high-water mark in Christian life and devotion which was so steadily maintained throughout his career in China and Mongolia. An apostolic passion for the salvation of his fellow-men took hold upon him. He would go out in the evening, mostly alone, and conduct short open-air services at Flamstead End, among the cottagers near Cheshunt railway station, and seize opportunities of speaking to labourers working by the roadside or in the field through which he might be passing. He became very solicitous for the conversion of friends in Scotland, and would come to my study and ask me to kneel and pray with him that God's grace might be manifested to them, and that His blessing might rest upon letters which he had written and was sending to them. The ordinary style of preaching towards which students usually aspire lost its attractions for him, and his sermons assumed more and more the character of earnest exhortations, and addresses to the unconverted. When he knew what was to be his field of labour after his college course was over, how solicitous he was to go out fully prepared and fitted in spiritual equipment! The needs of the perishing heathen were very real and weighed heavily upon his heart, and he was very anxious to win volunteers among his college friends for this all-important work. How he longed and prayed for China's perishing millions only his most intimate friends know."

Any detailed sketch of Gilmour's life is out of the question here. Our object is rather to glance into his very heart, through some of the windows which his correspondence and diaries supply. In this way we get beyond the mere word spoken or the outward deed to what is far more helpful, the temper of spirit and the state of soul of which word and deed were but the outward expression.

Here are the reasons he gives for choosing the post of hardship:

"Having decided as to the capacity in which I should labour in Christ's kingdom, the next thing which occupied my serious attention was the locality where I should labour. Occasionally before I had thought of the relative claims of the home and foreign fields, but during the summer session in Edinburgh (1867) I thought the matter out, and decided for the mission field. Even on the low ground of common sense I seemed to be called a missionary. Is the kingdom a harvest field? Then I thought it reasonable that I should seek to work where the work was most abundant and the workers fewest. Labourers say they are overtaxed at home, what then must be the case abroad, where there are wide stretching plains already white to harvest, with scarcely here and there a solitary reaper. To me the soul of an Indian seemed as precious as the soul of an Englishman, and the Gospel as much for the Chinese as for the European; and as the band of missionaries was few compared with the company of home ministers, it seemed to me clearly to be my duty to go abroad.

"But I go out as a missionary not that I may follow the dictates of common sense, but that I may obey that command of Christ, 'Go into all the world and preach.' He who said '*Preach*,' said also '*Go ye into* and preach,' and what Christ hath joined together let not man put asunder.

"This command seems to me to be strictly a missionary injunction, and, as far as I can see, those to whom it was first delivered regarded it in that light; so that apart altogether from choice and other lower reasons, my going forth is a matter of obedience to a plain command; and in place of seeking to assign a reason for going abroad, I would prefer to say that I have failed to discover any reason why I should stay at home."

On the eve of embarking, this was his Christian experience:

"Companions I can scarcely hope to meet, and the feeling of being alone comes over me till I think of Christ and His blessed promise, 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.' No one who does not go away, leaving all and going alone, can feel the force of this promise; and when I begin to feel my heart threatening to go down, I betake myself to this companionship, and, thank God, I have felt the blessedness of His promise rushing over me repeatedly when I knelt down and spake to Jesus as a present companion, from whom I am sure to find sympathy. I have felt a tingle of delight thrilling over me as I felt His presence, and thought that wherever I may go He is still with me. I have once or twice lately felt a melting sweetness in the name of Jesus as I spake to Him and told Him my trouble. Yes, and the trouble went away, and I arose all right. Is it not blessed of Christ to care so much for us poor feeble men, so sinful and so careless about honouring Him? The moment we come to Him He is ready with His consolations for us!"

China is notoriously one of the hard fields of missionary service. It was characteristic of him that he should rejoice when chosen for this field; it was also natural that he should plant himself in the hardest corner of this sterile vineyard, in Mongolia. Mission work had been carried on by Mr. Swann and Mr. Stallybrass in the neighbourhood of Kiachta from 1817 to 1841. It had been summarily suppressed in the latter year by Russian despotism, although the Russian Church

has in some sense continued mission work among the Buriats in that remote portion of the globe.

With the clear and resolute purpose of re-opening this mission, James Gilmour reached Peking in May, 1870. His constancy was tested even sooner than he, in all probability, expected. He had hardly resided a month in the great Chinese capital when the news of the Tientsin massacre of Roman Catholics arrived. Missionaries of many years' experience were greatly alarmed, and feared that at any moment a similar outbreak might sweep away all foreign Christian workers in Peking. Gilmour knew next to nothing of the country. As it takes a rapid student four years to acquire much control over the Chinese language, even he could have made but little progress in the first four weeks. Yet on the day after the news arrived here is the record in his diary :

"The Roman Catholic missionaries have suffered severely, and the Protestant missionaries are not in a very safe condition. We are living on the slope of a volcano that may put forth its slumbering rage at any moment. For example, people ask why there is no rain, and blame the foreigners for it; and, should a famine ensue, we may fare hard for it. Now is the time for trying what stuff a man's religion is made of. We may be all dead men directly; are we afraid to die? Our death might further the cause of Christ more than our life could do. We must die some time or other; now that we have a near view of its possibility, how can we look forward to it? God! do Thou make my faith firm and bright, so that death may seem small and not to be feared. Help me to trust Thee and Christ implicitly, so that with calm mind I may work while Thou dost let me live, and when Thou dost call me home, let me come gladly."

It was not improbable that all missionaries might have to fly at a moment's notice. Many had their goods packed and ready. Gilmour reasoned that departure would be fatal to the prospects of his work. Hence, after a month's uncertainty, he determined to throw himself boldly upon God's providential care and place himself as speedily as possible on the field of his life-work. He left Peking on August 5, 1870, and returned November 9, 1871. During this interval he had crossed the Plain of Gobi twice; he had explored the site of the earlier mission, and conversed with some of the converts; he had visited Urga, the religious centre of the Mongol worship and one of the most wicked towns on the surface of the globe; he had spent month after month in a Mongol tent, living exactly as the Mongols did, sharing their food, sleeping in their beds, acquiring, in an infinitely better way than any book-learning could give it, their difficult language, so entering into their habits of thought that he soon knew them better and more intimately than any other European living, and so impressing them by his life and conduct that they called him "our Gilmour," thus bestowing upon him the title which the next twenty years of his life were to make more and more manifestly his own. He had thus won perhaps the greatest victory of his life. He had cast himself entirely upon the Lord, and the good

hand of his God had been upon him to keep him in all his ways.

The measure of his endurance may be judged from the following extract. It occurs in his diary about three months after he left Peking. It was written while he was trying to get a teacher in the orthodox way, and before he went to live in the Mongol's tent.

"It is true I am taking notice of all I see, but it always occurs to me that this is not furthering the Mongolian Mission in any direct way. I often think of what Dr. Alexander said in his charge at my ordination: 'You do not go to discover new countries.' Would I had a teacher, that the language might go on full swing! To-day I felt a good deal like Elijah in the wilderness, when the reaction came on after his slaughter of the priests of Baal. He prayed that he might die. I wonder if I am telling the truth when I say that I felt drawn towards suicide. I take this opportunity of declaring strongly that on all occasions two missionaries should go together. I was not of this opinion a few weeks ago, but I had no idea how weak an individual I am. My eyes have filled with tears frequently these last few days in spite of myself, and I do not wonder in the least that Grant's¹ brother shot himself. Oh! the intense loneliness of Christ's life, not a single one understood Him! He bore it. O Jesus, let me follow in Thy steps, and have in me the same Spirit that Thou hadst!"

The method of his working may be seen in this extract:

"I went to visit tents a mile or two to the south. There found, as master of the tent, a black man (a layman) I had seen before, and as visitor a lama (Buddhist priest). From one thing to another we got to speak of God and His book. At last they asked me to read them a portion. I read in English a few verses, and gave them the parable of the Prodigal Son in Mongol colloquial. I also gave them a specimen of a sermon, and explained shortly the nature of God, when they all seemed pleased. The lama finished up the thing by saying, 'Your outward appearance differs from us, but inwardly you agree with us.' Coming home, I felt amply repaid for all the uncomfot and solitude, and leading a Mongol life, by the comparative ease with which I can converse with them, and the manner in which they wonder at my proficiency in the colloquial."

Having thus passed a hard apprenticeship, he set to work with all his energy to preach to such Mongols as he could reach the simple and free Gospel of salvation. The winters he passed in Peking, conversing with many of the Mongols brought there at that season by government duty, and living occasionally at the Yellow Temple, a great place of Mongol resort. He visited the plain every summer except when unavoidably detained in Peking by mission work, which he had to take up in the absence of others on furlough. In 1874 he married, and his wife, with a rare devotion and courage, more than once faced the hardships and privations of a life which, trying indeed to a man, must have been doubly so to a Christian lady. The Mongols have no idea of privacy. The tent is common ground. All have an equal right there, and the passing traveller is always welcome for food and lodging. Mr. and Mrs. Gilmour voluntarily endured this

¹ A Scotch trader resident in Keachta.

life—a daily and hourly crucifixion—rather than allow their work to be hindered by giving the Mongols the notion that they were haughty or exclusive. “O Lord, give me patience!” is a constant prayer in the diary.

Many were the hindrances. Colleagues in the mission-field were inclined to think at times that his rare abilities could be more usefully employed amid the teeming myriads of China. The home authorities very imperfectly appreciated the requirements of the work. The conditions of life on the plain were all against any hope of speedy progress. But he persevered, and we rejoice that he did so. It is needful from time to time in the mission field, as elsewhere, to have men who will persevere even to the death in the hardest of fields, and who will do it whether they can see the fruit of their labours or not, believing that God has placed the burden upon them, and that He can and He will take care of the work, if only the worker be faithful.

In the light of this view of Gilmour's character how impressive are extracts like the following:

“April 19, 1873.—To-day had more provocation from my Mongol, and my earnest prayer is that I may be able to stand it all, and not get soured in temper and feeling against the Mongols. I must have patience. Some

knowledge of camels' flesh also would help me not a little. As it stands, I feel an incompetent ‘duffer.’”

“Sept. 12.—We are now in a diphtheria district. I go into it, and hope to remain some time, trusting myself to the hands of God. I am safe enough in His hands. If He can forward mission work more by my death than by my life, His will be done.”

In his official report for 1873 he writes:

“This leaves me with a deficit of 110 taels, 63 cents,¹ and explains how it is that I ask next year's (1874) grant to be raised to 150 taels at least. I had only two courses open to me, either to use up the grants for 1872 and 1873 and stop without accomplishing all I could, or to make full proof of my ministry and exceed the grants. Considering the cause more important than silver, I chose the latter course, and, despite the most rigid economy, exceeded to the above amount. Present circumstances enable me to make up the deficit from my own private purse, and I don't ask to be refunded, but I don't know that I shall be flush of money next year, and *do* ask that the grant may be not less than 150 taels, which is the lowest estimate I can make. As proof of the reasonableness of my request, and of my anxiety to avoid drawing on the funds of the Society beyond what is absolutely necessary, I may be allowed to state that this year, in addition to making up the lacking 110-63 taels, I walked afoot behind my caravan in the desert for *weeks* to avoid the expense of purchasing another camel.”

R. LOVETT.

THANKFULNESS WITH AN “IF.”

THIS is not an uncommon sort of thankfulness. Many people are thankful with an “if.” At least, their words of thankfulness have an “if,” or a “when,” added.

“How thankful I should be, if the next mail brought better news of my son abroad!” says one.

“I should be thankful,” says another, “if the cloud were lifted, and I could see my way out of this difficulty.”

“I shall be so thankful, when I feel better, and can get about again,” says a third.

Are such “ifs” and “whens” wrong? No, they cannot be wrong, because they show that the speaker looks to God for the happy change he desires; and, should it come, will doubtless thank Him for it. The anxious mother prays that the mail may bring a better account, and will praise God when it comes. The person under the cloud prays in that darkness and perplexity, and will be truly thankful when light appears. The sick man prays on his bed, and will rise from it, and go about, with a thankful heart. As far as it goes, this is quite right, this looking to God, praying to God, and meaning to thank God.

But does this go far enough? Ought not the thankfulness to begin earlier? Should we not be thankful without ifs and whens? Should we not all be thankful now?

Yes, surely. Such words seem to imply (though

it is by no means always the case) that you are not thankful yet, but that you will be some day; or that you would be, if such and such a thing were to happen, but not otherwise. This cannot be right, for we are directed thus: “in every thing give thanks.”

Therefore begin now, if you are to give thanks in everything, give thanks now, under your present circumstances. Mix praise with prayer, after the pattern set by St. Paul: “In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. iv. 6). Do not put off being thankful till something or other happens; wait for nothing.

Is there nothing to be thankful for to-day? The mail is not in yet, and you know not what news it may bring; but, at least, you have heard no bad news. Remember, your son is in God's hands, however far he may be from you. When you pray for him, you put him afresh under His loving care. Leave him there, with a trustful and peaceful and thankful heart. “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord” (Psalm cxii. 7).

There is a cloud over you, and you cannot see your way at present. But, even under the cloud, there is much to give thanks for. To the children of Israel a cloud was even made the token of

¹ A sum equivalent to about £25.