

"The Voice by the Lake"

by Glenn Clark

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Chapter 1

HOW A TEMPEST WAS STILLED

Reverend and Mrs. Roland Brown and I were in the last stage of our trip around the world. The interdenominational prayer groups of America had sent us to link together the most vital praying people we could find in a great Belt of Prayer to encircle the globe. The Hot War had settled nothing, and the Cold War had proven equally futile, so thousands of Christians were asking—why not try a better way? We were a mere scouting squad in the "War of Amazing Kindness" being fostered by the Christians of America sent out to explore that "better way". And here, riding on the train from Tokyo to Omi Hachiman in the east land before returning home, we ran upon a story that had within it the secret of saving the world, everything we had been looking for.

"Nine years ago," we were told, "riding on this train would have been a very dangerous experience. Following the Second World War organized gangsters were holding up people on this main line and some of its branches in broad daylight. When police or train officials tried to interfere they were beaten up by the young hoodlums. The officials were at their wit's end. It was one of those hopeless situations until it suddenly was brought to an end by someone who tried the way of amazing kindness."

"Tell us the story," we urged.

"Well, along this stretch of track near Lake Biwa—Japan's most beautiful lake—stands the small town of Omi Hachiman. Here there lives a man who is called by the Japanese, 'The Voice by the Lake'. Years ago he found a new way to live and has been demonstrating it there through the Omi Brotherhood, which he founded. This man was elected some time before to be head of a civic improvement group—a society with a good name but few accomplishments.

"The railway officials asked this man if he could help them. The answer was, 'Yes, of course, I'll help you. I know just the thing that will work. But you must make me one promise. You must promise not to try other methods, such as calling in the police, until I've had a chance to try my way.' They promised.

" 'Now, can you tell me who their leaders are?' 'Yes, we know of six or seven gangs that are operating and they all come from the segregated Eta villages.' The Eta are a people who from ancient times have been a caste of butchers and tanners who have been much despised, and although segregation is today illegal still it persists because of popular prejudice. Such conditions obviously provide a fertile field for subversive activity of every sort.

" 'Which gang is the worst of the lot?' They told him, and then added, 'You'll have to be careful or you may be in danger yourself.' 'Don't worry about that. Give me their names and I'll do what I can.'

"And so he and his spiritual wife began to plan their strategy. First, they called in the civic group and told them what they were up against and said that they wanted the Society's help in one thing. They wanted plenty of good, sweet cakes to serve at tea to these gangsters. Sweet cakes are a rare and expensive item in Japan.

"Then he wrote very polite letters to the leaders of the gang which they had been told was worst, inviting them to come to tea on the following Sunday afternoon. Then he waited to see what would happen.

"Sunday morning there was a knock at the door. There stood a stranger who seemed to be in an unpleasant mood. He informed them that the leader could not come. This showed that the gangsters had received the invitations, that they had consulted together, and had decided not to come. But the politeness of the invitations had made them feel that they should at least make a proper refusal.

"In their pleasantest manner the 'Voice by the Lake' and his wife invited the bandit to come in. He seemed surprised and a little confused, but he stepped inside, looking around as though he expected a policeman to step out from behind a door at any moment. Yet he was held by the friendly spirit of his host and hostess.

"The host said, 'I have a great problem and I want your help.' The stranger was now really surprised. But still he feared a trap. 'It has been reported that there is corruption among the police and I need your help in clearing up this matter.' Evidently, then, the friendly host was not working with the police and the stranger relaxed a bit. Next, he was asked to persuade his friends to help in constructive efforts for the peace and prosperity of the entire prefecture so that it might rid itself of a bad reputation and become known as a model community.

"The speaker went on, 'Obviously, I can't do this myself, but I have heard that you and your friends are an energetic group of people, that you aren't afraid and that you might like to help us.'

"The stranger was really interested. 'If you will help me in this,' his host continued, 'I'll make you a promise. For as long as I have been in Japan I have been wanting to do something to stop the social discrimination that your villages suffer. If you will help me now, I promise you that I will spend the rest of life, if necessary, doing whatever I can, even if I have to stop everything else I am doing, to help you in this matter.'

"This won the man. The stranger had become a friend. Lunchtime came, and he was asked to stay for lunch. Since he had the good sense to watch the hostess and imitate her, he ate like a gentleman.

"About the time they were finishing, there was a great commotion outside. The host and his new friend went to the door. Here were the other young men who had been invited to tea but who were not supposed to have been able to come. They had come to find out what had happened to their emissary. He had gone to refuse the invitation and had been gone for hours. Evidently he had fallen into a trap. They had come with their heads tied in towels in gang fashion to rescue him.

"But here was their man standing with his host and smiling happily. In a moment the confusion was quieted and the leader spoke. He told the gang that everything was all right and that this man was his friend. Then they were all invited to come in. They were still suspicious, but seeing their leader go in, they all followed. Now was the time for tea and the sweet cakes. The 'Voice by the Lake' told his story again. And again the results were the same. Suspicion relaxed; interest and friendship were born.

"The leader of the gang began to bring four or five young men of his village at a time to call and get acquainted. After the third time he asked, 'I hope it is not too bothersome for you to have me bring these men now and then. I find that every one of them goes back a different man from what he was when he came.'

"Meanwhile, every Sunday for seven weeks that home had groups from different village gangs to tea. By the end of the first month, banditry on the local trains had disappeared, much to the surprise and relief of the people and officials.

"A plan was made for special efforts during the summer to extend the clean-up to a wider area. Three men at a time would ride the more distant trains and keep the peace. Their new friend promised that he would secure passes for them on the trains and armbands showing that they were officially appointed to work for peace and order. And then after the railway problem was straightened out, they would work on the discrimination problem. The man who had now won all their hearts went to the railway officials, told them what had happened, and obtained passes and armbands. He distributed them and waited to see the results.

"The results were like magic. Overnight, as if there had never been any, the robberies and violence disappeared over this whole section of track. For the first time in months people could ride from Kyoto to Maibara and on the branch lines, too, in safety.

"All summer these volunteers worked, keeping order on the trains. By the end of the summer the railway officials felt it was time to give public thanks to these men. So a serious formal ceremony in the usual Japanese style with certificates of thanks and many speeches, was held. High prefectural officials came to express their gratitude to these former gangsters.

"Now it was time to start on the rest of the program, to work on the Eta discrimination and to find further activities to keep these men busy.

"About this time the village, of which the first gangsters' community was a segregated part, asked their new found friend to come and lecture on 'Democracy and Christianity.' He said he would if the meeting were held in the auditorium of the school in the segregated area. There was some hesitation but this was finally agreed to.

"A village-wide meeting was to be held in the Eta's school auditorium! It was the first time for such a thing. Now the old gangs had a new job. People would come from all the rest of the village and from many other places, too. The Eta section would just have to be cleaned up. And so they went to work. Every house, every street, every gutter, every ditch was swept and scrubbed until there surely was no cleaner place in all Japan. Their houses might be poor, but they were clean and the streets were cleaner than those in the rest of the village.

"The effect of that meeting was far-reaching, but a still bigger one was held in the autumn when the Culture Society, which had been formed by the ex-gangsters, was formally amalgamated with a young men's organization of the adjoining village. This time people from all around attended. Greetings poured in from many places. Telegrams from National Government officials came. The head of the new Upper House of the Japanese Diet, himself an Eta, sent a telegram. The deputy governor of the prefecture and the Prefectural Chief of Police came in person and gave congratulatory speeches. It was a great day.

"The last speech given by the 'Voice by the Lake' ended with these words. 'God has a plan. We have seen it working out here in these last few months. God has a plan for each of us and for the nations of the world that will work just as well as the one here has worked.'

"And so a simple tea party grew into a constructive revolution. Here was the secret. Today the world is terrorized by a new type of gangsters, called Communists. Why not try this method, a method beautifully formulated and marvelously expressed two thousand years ago by a 'Voice by the Lake' of Galilee."

Just a few days before we arrived in Japan this April of 1954, Kagawa, in addressing two thousand

people in Tokyo said the prefecture around this lake had the lowest percentage of crime in all Japan. There hasn't been a murder in that area in the past fifty years, ever since the man known as "The Voice by the Lake" had come there. So no one was surprised when the man who made all this possible was nominated, "The most useful citizen of Japan" by the newspaper, Tokyo Mainichi, with a circulation of five million, when it gave him its Award for Social Service in 1947.

As soon as we reached the town of Omi Hachiman we were taken to home of this man where we remained as guests for almost a week.

In appearance he is the most "invisible-visible man" I ever saw. Of slender build, with light complexion and white hair, when he stands against the background of the sky one could pass by without noticing him. When he speaks in kindly, gentle tones against a background of city traffic his voice might go unnoticed. But once he turns his warm, kindly eyes in your direction and opens the storehouse of his soul and pours out a lively flood of past experiences, future dreams, and devotion to God and man, you become enthralled. But the moment you try to pin some credit upon him he laughs it aside. "Only God did this. I am nothing. Let the Omi Brotherhood get the credit." And so he slips back into invisibility again.

Our excuse in coming was to give a series of addresses to the Omi Brotherhood, a remarkable and almost Utopian Society; yes, a little kingdom of heaven on earth which had found its birth and inspiration from this man known as "The Voice by the Lake." But my real reason was to catch the *Spirit* of the Voice, himself.

This man who came to Japan fifty years ago this year without a cent, not supported as other missionaries are by Church Boards, today is directing an amazing evangelistic work, carried on by twenty-three full time workers through the Omi Brotherhood assisted by numerous volunteers. The Province is divided into seven districts with a responsible leader for each, and three committees to direct the work

They maintain fifteen regular preaching centers in addition to general touring; thirty Sunday schools; four kindergartens; three schools; three night schools; two day nurseries for the children of farmers during the planting and harvest seasons; several farmers' institutes; *New Omi*—an evangelistic monthly with over four thousand circulation; a general Christian magazine (*the Voice at the Lakeside*) with over five thousand circulation; correspondence evangelism; a lending library of Christian books; Bible study by mail and in groups; personal visitation; relief work of various types; and the distribution of printed matter.

His real name is Merrell Vories but as he has spent two thirds of his long life in Japan he has added to it the Japanese name of Hitotsuyanagi. So for brevity's sake I shall call him Merrell. But when you break through the outer shell, something very easy to do with this simple, spontaneous, joy-filled man, you will find that the name that really fits him best, even better than the "Voice by the Lake" is "The Spirit of the Lake." For deep within him lies profound serenity, great silent spaces (his grace at the table is always a silent grace), great purity (this lake water is the purest in the world), great simplicity and, like a lake, his soul is a mere reflection of the mountain peaks of God.

Two years ago I had the honor of breakfasting in the Prince George Hotel, New York City, with Merrell and Hachino Yevasa, President of the International Christian University of Japan of which Merrell was the architect. I was especially invited as they wanted my prayer for the success of the university. It so happened that people who believe profoundly in the power of prayer from all over New York, New Jersey, and New England were holding a Retreat that weekend in Norman Vincent Peale's church and I was to address them that night, so I invited these gentlemen to come. Merrell

accepted the invitation.

Visiting with him before the series began I discovered that the hymnbooks used in the church contained a hymn, the words and music of which were both composed by him. I told him that I planned to have the congregation sing that and asked if he would give a brief address before I spoke. He said he didn't want to take any of my time but he would consent to play the accompaniment for the hymn.

"You are as versatile as Schweitzer!" I exclaimed. "An architect, poet, composer, and pianist! What else can you do?"

"In a modest way I am trying like Schweitzer to build a little Kingdom of Heaven in a foreign land at the farthest ends of the earth—but instead of going to Africa I went to Asia . . . but Schweitzer went as a famous man. I went as nothing."

Chapter 2

JESUS' PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED FINDS MODERN FULFILLMENT

Now that I was in his home I asked him to tell the story of how this all came about. So piecing together some things he told, some things he had written, and getting all the data from every source available I give you the story—in many ways the most remarkable adventure in kingdom building of modern times. The names of David Livingstone, Albert Schweitzer, Wilfred Grenfell, George Muller and Jane Addams have found their way into the halls of fame because of permanent work for good they have accomplished, but I am not exaggerating when I say if all their achievements were lumped together they would still fall short of the permanent accomplishments achieved by the "Voice by the Lake."

Although I omit the conventional quote marks, the rest of this chapter is in his Voice.

I don't deserve any credit for what I have done, he began, for all I did was to obey the commands Jesus gave, and he did everything through me. To begin at the beginning my hobby in my youth was architecture. As a matter of fact it was my passion—something I felt I could not give up for anything, but when I attended a Student Volunteer Convention and listened to the message of a wonderful woman, Mrs. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission, a greater purpose took form in my heart—to go into some neglected foreign field to begin a pioneer mission, earning my own living rather than being paid a salary by some mission board. The tentmaking of St. Paul in his missionary work had impressed me. Then a letter came informing me that an opening had come which might prove exactly such as I had suggested. Here was a Japanese government academy in an interior town at the heart of a whole province where no missionary had yet resided; and the provincial authorities wanted a teacher of English so much that they would concede him permission to teach Bible classes in his leisure time, so long as he refrained from mentioning religion in the class rooms. Thus I might earn my living by teaching, and at the same time inaugurate mission work in virgin soil. The opportunity impressed me as being so peculiarly what I had been praying for, that within a few hours after receiving the letter I had accepted.

But how could I give up my cherished dream of becoming an architect? The answer came in the words of Jesus, "Unless you are willing to relinquish your father and your mother and your sisters and your brothers and your houses and lands ye are not worthy of the Kingdom. But if you relinquish these things you cherish for the Kingdom's sake not only will you receive the Kingdom but your father and mother and homes and lands besides." The amazing fulfilling of this law was to be one of the greatest experiences of my life. With a prayer in my heart and leaving everything I called precious I started for Japan.

On arriving in Tokyo, I went to the national headquarters of the Y.M.C.A. to receive further directions. What I heard there regarding my future field of labor speedily convinced me that I had certainly been led to a most needy and neglected portion of the unevangelized world. In brief, I was told this: "The province of Omi, to which you are going, is an inland division of the country, cut off from the surrounding parts by a girdle of mountains, isolated from foreign contact, conservative to a degree, has never been occupied by a foreign missionary, and is not only virgin soil, but in the belt of the last stronghold of the once all-powerful Buddhism. The common people you will find priest-ridden almost beyond approach; the students and teachers of your school, on the other hand, being educated out of the superstitious forms of Buddhism—which are all they have known—will be either indifferently agnostic or openly opposed to all religion. You will find nothing prepared for

you; but everything against you. You will have three-quarters of a million people all to yourself. Do not be discouraged if, inside of two years, you can see no results in the missionary part of your work."

If I was somewhat disheartened at this, imagine how much more so when, after a long, lonely journey on the slow, narrow-gauge train, I found myself set down upon a forsaken-looking station platform, in the midst of a wide plain, and realized that there was not another man of my race within a radius of thirty miles, nor one with whom I could even converse intelligently—since I had not yet learned a word of Japanese.

Even the elements had conspired to emphasize my loneliness. A piercing northeast wind swept the plain. It was already darkening, though only about four o'clock on a February afternoon. I looked about and realized the tremendous odds, felt that I literally faced 800,000 hostile beings, without even a medium of communicating with them, and experienced a feeling of unspeakable solitariness, inadequacy, and homesickness.

Once established at the school, to overcome my loneliness I invited the boys to make the little old Japanese house which I was occupying their rendezvous during their leisure hours, and promised to try to entertain them when they should come.

This invitation did not go begging. In the first place, it was no small attraction that a real live American could be inspected at close range, and in his native surroundings so to speak for I had with me American furnishings and trinkets and a large and varied collection of views and postcards that gave intimate glimpses of that Promised Land of Japanese youth: America. Who wouldn't come, and tell his friends, too? And finally, when the curiosity waned, there were those delectable foreign games—new and glamorous there (although almost prehistoric at home)—such as Dominoes, Flinch, Ping-Pong, and the like.

But entertainment alone, of the students or of myself, was not the purpose of these social evenings. I was studying my field. I was on the lookout for an opening for the work that formed my main purpose.

As soon as I had picked the leaders from among the groups that frequented my house, I addressed myself to them in particular, believing that the rank and file would naturally follow them. And to each such student I put a strange and enigmatical question: "Will you join a Bible class if I organize one for students?"

Blank looks, at first, were my response, for most of them knew little or nothing of what the question might imply. Then some thought, "If it is another kind of American game, I'll certainly be there!"

Now it so happened that a young teacher in the academy, who had been deeply impressed by a Christian teacher he had met, had been secretly praying that a Christian teacher would come to the school. It was remarkable how God had prepared that young Japanese Christian for the hour of need. It was because of his ability in English that he had been retained in the school. Here he came forward to be my speech for me; to take my English paragraphs, as I explained the lesson verse by verse, and to interpret them skillfully, and in the true spirit of the original, which is the crux of all translation.

And the students came. When the chairs and cushions were all filled and still they came, we carried

out the furniture, took out sliding partitions, and all sat on the floor of the enlarged room. There were forty-five in that first session, but before many weeks had passed the total enrollment was three hundred and twenty-two.

Very soon these young men began to perceive that here was no new kind of American game, but something vital; something that appealed to a deep chord in their beings, and promised better things than they had yet dared dream of. It was indeed pathetic to see the soul-hunger of many who had nothing before to arouse their dormant spiritual natures. They were not deliberately depraved fellows. They had simply never before had an appeal made to the best in them. Now there began to be put to me that question of the hearers of John the Baptist, "What, then, must we do to be saved?" And, it was an unspeakable joy to be able to point the inquirers, as he did, to the Lamb of God.

But after awhile it became clear that something more was needed in our teaching of the Christian life than mere talking about it once a week to groups of students. I was from the first making a study of local conditions, because I found the most telling points in our lessons were the ones that were illustrated by application to the lives and habits of the students themselves. What was needed were concrete examples. I could not point to a single member of the faculty as an illustration fit for emulation. I could not find a priest in the town—although there were some sixteen temples and shrines of Buddhism and Shintoism in our midst—who was a fit example for young men. And so far as I could learn, not even among the fathers, in the more or less distant homes from which the boys came, was there the type of moral righteousness that a young man could be advised to follow!

My able assistant, the young Japanese instructor, who had meantime come to live with me, suggested that if we could get a student to come and live with us, we could help him to apply the principles of Christianity, hour by hour, to the practical problems of student life; and thus develop from their own number an example that would solve our dilemma. We invited one of the older boys to share our humble home, and he gladly came. Then others asked to come and were admitted, as far as there was room, till only a disused and rat-infested attic remained. And when two more boys came to ask admittance to our "family," we had to tell them that the attic was their only hope.

We made a tour of inspection and found such a dilapidated, doorless, windowless, dusty and dingy place as you would have thought unfit for a hen coop. Yet our young friends settled the matter with the dictum: "We believe we can fix this up all right; and anyway it doesn't matter about the room, we only want to live with you!"

Our family now numbered eight young men, besides ourselves and our housekeepers. The little house was over-taxed. We were "close friends" in too many senses; and besides we felt that if we had more with us, results might be greater. So we set out to rent a larger house. But search as we might, no suitable place could be found. And this was providential, though at first—like so many of the providences that have shaped this work better than our plans—it seemed a calamity.

Nothing was left, if we hoped for advance, except the very thing we should have thought of long before: namely, to build a house that would meet the need. So was evolved the idea of a Y.M.C.A. building that would embody not only quarters for a larger "family" of students, but also facilities for social and intellectual and spiritual service to the whole student body, should they care to use them. Since our own savings were very meager, we had to apply for outside aid in this project; and for this we formally organized as a Y.M.C.A. and then appealed to American friends in a circular letter that was addressed to only about thirty individuals for assistance. A quick response encouraged us to go

ahead, and presently we had the plans worked out and the money in hand.

But here we met with another trying obstacle. Not everyone was delighted with the spread of Christianity, and we found to our chagrin that not a square foot of ground would be sold to us for a Christian building! Here was indeed a set-back! There followed weary and unsuccessful days of search for some out-of-the-way lot that might be got by over-paying, and efforts to buy through outside agencies. And then when we were despairing and about to give up, we were granted another demonstration of where the Power that was really carrying forward this work had its source. And this was the way of it.

A middle-aged Japanese man came to our town one day, bought the most desirable corner lot in the place, and then called upon me to tell me why he had bought it. Many years before he had lived here as a boy. Later he had gone to the city of Kyoto and established a dairy. There he had come under the influence of that great Japanese Christian, Joseph Hardy Neesima, and had become a Christian himself. Almost immediately the idea had possessed him that he must build a church in the town of his boyhood. That had been fifteen years before; and during all those years he had been saving, little by little, for this one purpose. Today he had purchased the lot where later the church should be erected!

The reports of our own work here had encouraged him to believe the time was near for that church to be realized. He had come to thank us for our efforts and to propose mutual cooperation. And this cooperation on his part meant that half the choice location he had just secured was to be ours for our Y.M.C.A. building!

How we had worried and fretted and despaired over our inability to buy some little back-street lot! And lo! for fifteen years our God had been preparing for us the best spot in the town! So we learned our second lesson.

Long before this, the beginnings of the little church our new friend was working for had been made. When we came to prepare for a church into which we might introduce our student converts, we found that already there were a few townspeople who in times past, and some of them in places remote, had accepted the Faith. And this tiny group were assembling Sunday by Sunday, in a little house belonging to one of their number, to encourage each other in their mutual ideals. Here was a beginning; but there was no pastor, and no one qualified to act as such. So we began to hold church services, in which I acted as preacher, organist, and choir, with the cooperation of the young Japanese instructor, who was in everything the more efficient half of the team.

In less than three years that humble beginning had so prospered that the little congregation, although composed of people of small means, was able to build for itself a modern church edifice, and to raise the salary for a native pastor to shepherd the flock. And not a cent for building, salary, or current expenses has been given them from America.

But just as everything was unfolding in lovely fashion a violent movement was stirred up against us by the Buddhist priests. When their protest to the school authorities went unheeded they incited the unruly element among the student body to engage in a new sport—bullying and persecuting the boys who attended the prayer and Bible meetings. And finally, through a chain of increasing viciousness, force was resorted to; and the time came when a mob of the opposing students would attack a single one of our group, and leave him, after serious hazing, by the roadside at night.

Then it seemed that something must be done to stop the depredations. Once again I felt a touch of that first-day panic. It seemed a tremendously lonely situation. There was no one of mature age or experience with whom to consult. There was not even a single native Christian of years' standing to whom I could turn. And when my young men came to me for suggestion, I could only refer them—with, I fear, faint assurance—to the One remaining Source of aid.

The situation was discussed in a meeting of these inexperienced boys, only a few of whom were as yet avowedly Christians; and by them it was determined what would be attempted.

Oh, what a childish, unsophisticated, futile scheme was theirs, and how the opposition laughed with glee and derision when they learned of it! They decided that they could not consistently use force, and that the only thing left to try was—prayer. It was a simple plan: merely to start for school fifteen or twenty minutes early each morning, and to come to my study and spend the extra time in united prayer for solution of the problem. And this, they fondly thought, would help matters.

And although all this was done unobtrusively almost secretly, the effects on the lives of the young men could not be hidden. Even their faces showed the differences and their fortitude under the persecution could not but impress even their persecutors.

At length our persecutors determined to learn what sort of performances were practiced in the early prayer meeting that such results should be obtained; and so they sent a couple of their own group to spy upon us.

And what an astonishing discovery these men made! They crept into the back of the room, scarcely noticed and behind the circle of prayers, now grown large, and the praing began. What! not a word of crying for vengeance upon their enemies! Not a murmur of pleading for cunning to overcome! Not even a request for the lightening of their sufferings! No; the petitions were all for forgiveness and salvation for their oppressors; and for themselves such patience and Christlikeness of spirit under their persecutions, that their lives might convince their fellow students of the Truth they professed! That was too much for the spies, they were overcome and melted to tears in that very meeting which they had come to report upon.

What they told those who sent them I know not nor is it possible here to tell all the steps of the denouement, which included some personal work by individual members of the praying group. But this much must be told within the month each of the two leaders of the opposition came voluntarily to my study, singly and unbacked by the other; each made a full confession, and asked me if I thought there was any hope for him! And when I assured them that there was the best kind of hope, each went further into detail and told of the plans that had not yet carried and the secret sins of his own life. And when I still pointed out that the very fact of his present concern over past sins indicated the hopefulness for another chance, and turned his plea for personal forgiveness for his injuries to us by saying that we who asked pardon from our Master for so much ourselves, could not refuse the same to a brother man. Then each of them asked to go before the whole group of our students and repeat his confession there.

So I saw the marvelous sight of those two erstwhile bullies standing before the group of young men against whom they had led the bitterest of persecutions, and with tears falling down their cheeks asking for pardon. And not personal pardon only, but asking them to continue to pray for them, that in time they might be worthy to join their number, and to be known, also, as Christians!

So there came about the complete, voluntary surrender of the opposition, without the lifting of a finger of force; through this same childish, unsophisticated, futile means of prayer!

It was not to be expected that the Buddhist priests, who had started the opposition, would be convinced by our success. Instead, they were only the more alarmed. Their opposition took on a more formidable aspect when they brought it into the open. The leading newspaper of the province was persuaded to publish a series of articles against Christianity in general and against us in particular; and these articles were prepared with great vigor and force, if with small intelligence. Then, the priests won over a number of representatives in the Provincial Assembly, and it became a political issue whether or not the American teacher should be permitted to have personal religious convictions! Politics are not so different in the Orient from those in the Occident.

At last the pressure became so great that the Principal was forced to ask me to resign. To be cast out with no visible means of support, with doors closed to me on all sides forced me to turn to God as never before. To leave the spiritual work I had come to do when it was just getting a good start would have been fatal. And then the prayers began to be answered.

When one of the students whose life had been changed through my work learned that I was to be discharged at the time of his graduation, he persuaded his family to continue sending him his schooling allowance, and that the two of us should live upon this allowance that came to about \$8.50 a month. Next word came that an anonymous American was sending me \$25.00 a month. So God was assuring my survival, but my personal survival was not what I had come to Japan for. How could I carry on the work? That became the central theme of my prayers.

It was then that God gave back to me the precious thing that years before I had discarded in order to put first the call to work for His Kingdom. With great joy and gladness I turned to architecture as the only means I knew of to support me and help me support the work that was dearer to me than life. I had observed in traveling about the Empire in my vacations, while I was still teaching, that a good deal of uneconomical building had been done by various missions, and that some rather inconvenient buildings had cost over much, where the builders were at the mercy of the native contractors. The thought came to me that I might be able to serve other missions while earning support for our own. And so it has proved.

When the missions welcomed my help I ceased to lament the lost energy I had spent in my youth acquiring all the knowledge and skill I could in architecture. Not only did I save the missions money but I was able to put Christian practices in the way the buildings were built. Other organizations sought our help until the time came when I employed thirty architects and we had to open offices to take care of our work in most of the largest cities of Japan as well as cities in China, Korea, and Formosa.

In a wider sense the architectural department aims to be an evangelistic agency and to an increasing extent is approaching its aim. This is in its contacts with clients and with the workmen who construct our buildings. Throughout Japan it is known that there is one architectural office which employs no one who drinks or smokes; which not only demands Sunday rest and a maximum of eight hours per day of work for its own staff, but seeks to obtain like conditions for the lowest laborer on any job it superintends by putting a Sunday-Rest clause into all its specifications and which is trying to put into everyday practice the principles of Jesus Christ. This knowledge has slow but sure influence throughout the building and labor trades, which are not being directly evangelized by any other organization.

Chapter 3

BIRDS BUILD NESTS 1N ITS BRANCHES

"Not only have we seen some results in a changed attitude among contractors and workmen, but even more among clients have there been cases of changed lives." With these words Merrell had ended his story.

"How did the firms you dealt with accept your Christian practices?" I asked.

"At first there was considerable remonstrance and some resistance," he replied. "But step by step we won out. Jesus stated the principle when he said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Here is an example. We were the architects for a great insurance building that was to go up just a block away from where a great bank building was to be erected. In contrast to the latter, where the men were to work ten to twelve hours a day seven days a week, we insisted that the laborers who worked on our building were to work eight hours a day and have half day off on Saturday and all day Sunday."

"The President of the Board of Directors said, 'Do you know the cost of interest we will lose on this two million dollar project?'

"`Yes,' I said. 'But we believe in being as fair to the laboring man as to the executives in charge. There are other architectural firms. You are perfectly free to choose one of them instead of us if you wish.'

"They stayed by us, and to their surprise the building was erected much sooner than the bank building and it was a much better job. The result was this company engaged us for all their branch offices and most of the Board of Directors had me plan their private homes for them."

"You say your work had an actual evangelizing effect upon many men?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "A great effect upon the workers themselves. One of the byproducts was that we had no labor troubles. But it was heartening to see the effect it had on men of influence who had us plan their build-up. Through architecture alone many conversions have been made."

"Give me an example," I said.

A brilliant Japanese physicist, a professor in Japan's Imperial University, named Sukeyyoshi Suzuki wanted a modern Italian-style residence built. He was an avowed atheist.

"I have no need of religion," he said, "because physics solves all the problems of the universe."

"We were together often going over the plans. One day he came to my room and locked the door and said, 'Please teach me how to pray. At last I have come up against a problem that physics can't solve.' "

"`Prayer,' I replied, 'is just conversing with God. We have a perfect model prayer given to us by Christ,' and I gave him a New Testament for pocket use and a complete Bible."

Soon he requested instruction and residence with the Omi Brotherhood. He remained here several years learning how Christianity can be applied in industry, education and social service. He resigned from the university and, like Schweitzer, sought the remotest northwest area of Japan where, as he put it, he "could start a work like this where there is none."

During the war he boldly preached against it and for eight months was subjected to the most dreadful inquisition. He was so steadfast to what he considered the principles of Jesus that the police not only failed to break him but he converted three of the inquisitors. They marvelled at his ability to stand wartime police grilling.

"What have you," they finally asked, "that you can take that and not break under it? We couldn't have done it."

"That is very simple," Mr. Suzuki replied, "read this." And he gave each of them a copy of the New Testament. The result was that half of them became Christians.

Another proof that Christianity in action is the greatest bulwark against Christianity's archenemy, Communism, is the following incident. One day a mature, stout-hearted man came to Merrell and boldly stated that he was an atheist and a Communist. He said that he had no use for Christianity which just promises "pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye." Mr. Vories asked this stalwart zealot just to sit down and tell him all about his doctrine, teaching, and plans. He talked very loftily about the great new age and new world. After patiently listening to his ranting, Vories said, "That's all great. Now that I've heard about it, where can I go see some of these great places in action."

At that the fledgling Communist balked, coughed, and sputtered, and said, "Er ... well, we're right in the midst of thinking this through, we've got nothing operating yet, but just wait . . . just wait."

"Well, while you're waiting, tomorrow bring your lunch and I'll show you around a place that is operating right now in the nasty here and now." Yes, the next day the young Communist came with his lunch and some friends. As they were paraded around the plant, their eyes opened bigger, eyebrows heightened, and they were amazed at the practical outworking of this practical Christianity. Instead of hearing a sermon preached, they saw a sermon lived. After making a complete tour of the plant, one of them shyly asked, "If it's not a confidential secret, could you just tell us a few of the principles or policies of your organization?"

Vories smilingly said, "Nothing secret about it. Here is the Constitution and the bylaws," and he handed him a New Testament. "Just read that and put it into action."

And now an entirely new branch of service opened up to Merrell Vories. The architectural department was being continuously embarrassed by requests from clients that he arrange to purchase abroad for them certain items of building equipment then not available in Japan in either the quality or quantities desired. He had already made connections with building hardware and house paints so it was an easy step to introduce to Japan many needed household articles that were being produced by highly esteemed friends under highly Christian conditions.

But an additional stimulus was urging him to attempt a business venture. This was the cynical attitude of his neighbors who professed to believe that the principles of Christ which he was advocating, although ideal in theory, are impossible to apply in a successful modern business.

Here was a challenge. With all circumstances seemingly against him he would go forth to meet it.

With his headquarters in a little insignificant interior town, he launched his business; its capital was largely imaginary and its "shares" held by only the Mission Staff, he would never require more than eight hours work per day (with competitors running up to twelve). There would be no Sunday labor and no one would be employed who used liquor or tobacco. Everyone would be a potential partner. There would be no dividends; all net proceeds would be devoted to Christian work; and finally there would be no salaries for officers apart from their regular mission allowances.

Mentholatum became the largest item in this venture into the field of business. Later the Airwick people offered him their agency provided he sell 10,000 within the first six months. His sales staff already in the good graces of the retailers had no difficulty selling 50,000.

Now it so happens that schooling for children is paid by the government through Junior High School, but only the well-to-do can afford to go through Senior High. So Merrell accepted the girls for his Mentholatum factory only from poor families ready to enter Senior High. He works them only five hours a day but pays them for eight hours. He set aside classrooms in his factory and hired the best of teachers who give these 120 girls a full three-year Senior High school course in five years.

He took us through the factory and I never saw a happier set of girl workers. In 1940 Merrell Vories decided that after living forty years in a country he should become a naturalized citizen. He never dreamed that within a year Japan and the United States would be at war and all missionaries locked up in prison camps. He thus was not arrested nor were his factories bombed, situated so far from the large cities, so he was able to carry on his Christian work all through the war, building foundations for peace and good will the moment war came to an end.

"One final question," I said. "You were plagued by opposition at the beginning and were beset by enemies. Did you and your enemies ever get reconciled?"

"Five years after I was kicked out of the school," he replied, "because I was teaching Christianity on the side, I was invited to return and teach ethics in the regular curriculum. Instead of being suppressed from teaching Jesus surreptitiously, I was paid to teach Him openly. The boy who persecuted our work the most became my devoted secretary. And the most bitter enemy of all became diabetic and would have died if he had not been able to get insulin which I alone was able to secure for him, and when he learned this all his opposition to my work ended. His son led such a profligate life that all his children suffered from it and when full realization of this came upon him, in remorse he committed suicide and I have been helping his children ever since. The lovely young lady that served you at our table is one of them."

A citizen told Merrell the other day, "When you came we did all we could to drive you out. Today if you tried to leave we would build a fence around you to keep you in. You came to save us spiritually. You not only succeeded in doing that but you have saved us economically as well." "You are a fool," said another. "You could have been a millionaire and you don't even own the house you live in. You accept less than \$100 salary a month, giving all the rest away." Yes, Merrell is a fool for God. If we had a few more fools like that we would have a heaven on earth.

His wife also believes in democracy in action. She was the daughter of a feudal lord and a wonderful authority on education, head of his entire educational system, consisting of fifty teachers and four hundred pupils and yet finds time to take care of over a hundred guests in their house every month.

Now I have left the Omi Brotherhood behind and will probably never see it again. I shall never forget the sight of that unique, naive, cheery, selfless man. Against the background of noisy, city streets his voice is hardly heard. Against the background of the sky his slender figure is hardly seen. But whenever people ask me if Christ's idealistic teachings can be applied to practical life, the crowded streets and the open sky all echo with a resounding, "Yes." And when I ask from whence comes that strong affirmation, the reply is, "From the Voice by the Lake."