

A Missionary Life in Korea

Let me begin with the missionary dream. I grew up in a devout Presbyterian family: family prayers every night, Church, Sunday School, Christian Endeavor, Sunday night Church every Sunday; and my parents went also to Wednesday night prayer meeting; too bad there were no Daybreak Prayer Meetings in those days. Early in High School I felt a desire to become a minister, but I thought I was not good enough- the truest thought I ever had. A little later my two older sisters and brother and I were invited to a Christian summer conference for young people at Stony Brook, Long Island; the last night a missionary gave a stirring talk and asked the young people to come forward and give their lives for full-time missionary service; we four were not sitting together but we all went forward; after finishing our education my two sisters and I landed in Korea; my brother, in Cleveland, Ohio. *minister*

During my senior year at Princeton Seminary I served as Director of young peoples' work at Third Church, Prenton, N. J., and one Sunday two seminary students came down to give their negro spiritual routine; the next morning at our Seminary breakfast they reported on Fran Kinsler having all those beautiful girls to work with, and one of them added: "And, gosh, he gets paid for it"; but that's not the half of it; there I found and won the dearest and best companion of my life.

That year Dr. George Shannon McCune, president of Union Christian College, Pyengyang, Korea gave the Mission lectures at the Seminary; he started talking to me about going to Korea; I held back at first, and then I said: "I have two sisters and three first cousins and their families in Korea and the Church there is already developing; I want to go to a pioneer field." He said, "That's just what I want, somebody to set up a Mission in Manchuria and Mongolia for our college and seminary graduates"; and then he added, "The Mission Board quota for new missionaries is filled, you'll have to raise \$5000." I went to my room thinking 'he's asking for a double bargain: me and \$5000', so the next time I said, "I'll go, if you get the money."

Let me digress for a moment: I was named for my dear Aunt Frances. As a child I objected to my parents: "Why did you name me Francis? That is a girl's name"; they said, "Well, we debated whether to name you Francis or Archibald"; that settled that. My Aunt Frances did Church work in Cleveland and spent her Mondays on the lakefront estate of a Mrs. Taylor, owner of the Taylor Department Store in Cleveland. That week-end Mrs. Taylor was spending at the Princeton Inn. Dr. McCune went to ask her for \$5000 for a new missionary for Korea. "What's his name?" she asked; he said, "well, you don't know him, but his name is Francis Kinsler"; "Don't know him", she exclaimed, "she's my best friend." She wrote the check, and I got to Korea, but Dorothy was not yet finished in College.

At that time I phoned my mother to tell her I was going to Korea; she said something like "that's fine", but her voice broke. Later that Spring, as her Presbyterian President, she asked me to tell the ladies why I was going to be a missionary; I did the best I could; but sometime later I learned that she and the Almighty had arranged for me to be a missionary before I was born.

In Pyengyang, Korea I was assigned to live with the McCunes, and to study the language. I made some trips to Manchuria. I spent the first Christmas with Dr. and Mrs. Jonathan Goforth, in Manchuria. Later I spent a day crossing the broad steppes of Manchuria in a beat-up, broken-down, overloaded bus, I felt the springs were entirely gone; at a stop the Chinese driver, pointing to his Chevrolet bus, asked me through my Korean interpreter: "Do you have *pointing to his Chevrolet bus.*"

anything like this in America?" Hardly!

After an over-night train trip to the Northern city of Harbin, in Manchuria it was so bitterly cold in the morning that I asked the hostess of the place where I was to stay: "What is the temperature this morning?" She said, "we don't know; the thermometer isn't up yet."

On another trip with the Dr. Goforth team to a town on the Manchurian-Mongolian border we went to a restaurant where the ceiling, the walls, the floor, the tables, and the chairs were black, and a Chinese boy was dusting off the tables and chairs with a totally black rag; we had wolf meat for supper. A little later the innkeeper asked us: "Where are you going next?" "Into Mongolia", we said; "Oh," he said, "those Mongolians are dirty." What a missionary dream!

In 1932 Japan seized Manchuria and ruled it with military might. On returning from another trip and changing trains at Sipingka I was surrounded by four Japanese plain-clothes men; they snatched my suitcase, opened it on the platform and looked for proof that I was an American spy; when they found nothing but shirts, socks and a Bible they left in disgust, and I could see that an American missionary wouldn't be much help for Chinese or Korean Christians living in Manchuria. So much for my missionary dream.

Let me go on with the missionary reality. Dorothy had finished college and came to Korea in 1930; the McCunes gave us a great wedding in their front yard under the spreading chestnut tree. All the Station came, all the teachers and students from the Missionary Kid School right next door came; they came from the College faculty and student body; from the Korean General Assembly and the National Federation of Missionaries meeting in Pyengyang at the time, and they came from country Churches I had visited; luckily, only two of them got the idea of kissing the bride; and they were both missionaries.

Pyengyang had the largest Presbyterian Mission Station in the world at that time. The monthly meetings were downright exciting: business in the afternoons, reports in the evening, of evangelistic campaigns, Bible Conferences, revivals in schools and Churches; new Churches in city and country, until MaSwallen would break out singing a hymn, like "O, that will be glory for me," and we'd all join in. In his annual report one year Dr. C. A. Clark reported fourteen different kinds of work, each one of them a man-sized job; then Dr. Eli Mowry got up to give his report and began: "Dr. Clark reported 14 kinds of work; St. Paul said, 'This one thing I do'; then he reported his own two kinds of work: teaching science in the college all week, and visiting one or more of his fifty country Churches on Sunday. Dr. McCune was a very busy man as President of the College, Principal of the Boys' Academy, promoter of various other enterprises; he often came home about nine o'clock in the evening to find his study full of Koreans waiting to talk with him; one such night he came home, locked into the living room and saw his son and me playing a game of checkers with a bowl of fudge beside us which we had persuaded to cook to make; he didn't say a word, he didn't need to, the look on his face was enough; he just went into the study to talk to his Koreans. Let me say, these missionaries had one passion: to make Christ known, and to establish a self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating Church.

Dorothy and I had to learn the language, and before long she had three children to raise. I taught English in the College, then courses in the Men's Bible Institute, and then I was invited to teach a course in the Women's Higher Bible School, and that was stimulating. Two years before returning to Korea from our first furlough I received a letter from Dr. Stacy Roberts,

President of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, saying that I was assigned to teach in the Seminary and would I please prepare to teach courses on the Book of Isaiah and ^{of John} the Book of Ezekiel and the Gospel, in the Fall term? Woh! I thought I might handle Isaiah if I could get Ezekiel off my back; so I offered to teach something like beginners' Greek instead of Ezekiel, and Dr. Roberts said 'yes'. This was real missionary life teaching all week and preaching in my country Churches on Sundays.

To go back near the beginning, during those years countless little boys and girls would be seen playing on the dusty, dirty streets all day long and into the night; there were no schools for them, and little home life. One cold, February night one of the missionary ladies said, "I'm afraid beggar boys will freeze tonight, can't something be done?" with my language teacher and two college boys we got permission to use the attic room over the Christian Book Store on Main Street, and gathered six beggar boys to sleep around a pot-bellied stove; they came back the next night, and the next; we had to do more for them, so we began telling Bible and other stories, singing hymns and songs, praying, and playing games; more boys came and we held classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, and Bible; and by summer the attic room was filled with boys coming every night: it was the first Night Club in Korea. They were called Pioneer Clubs at first; later, Bible Clubs.

We began other clubs, in the mornings for both boys and girls that summer in the Men's and Women's Bible Institute buildings; in the Fall we persuaded some city Churches to allow us to use some of their rooms, and the children came in large numbers. We had college and seminary scholarship students to do the teaching in the late afternoons and evenings. We organized our educational program after the example of the Boy Jesus who "increased in wisdom"- the intellectual side of life; "and in stature"- the physical side of life; "and in favor with God"- the religious side of life; "and in favor with man"- the social side of life. Five days a week study classes, worship hour, physical exercise and games and music periods were conducted; one day of each week was called "Club Day"; it began with the "Worship ceremonial" which the children conducted, led the singing, offered sentence prayers, recited Bible verses, and repeated together Luke 2:52 and saluted together as a pledge of living the four-fold Christian life. Periods of physical exercises and games, music, and a business meeting to plan programs and social services followed, all conducted as far as possible by the boys and girls themselves. Life and work in Pyeongyang Station seemed too good to be true; and, alas it was.

Let me go on with the missionary agony. In 1936 a military coup changed the whole government of Japan. Soon train-loads of Japanese troops passed through the city to fight in China. The government imposed Japanese shrine worship on all students and the Korean Presbyterian General Assembly was forced to approve the shrine worship. The Theological Seminary, the Mission Schools, the Bible Clubs were forced to close. Then, in 1940 the American State Department advised all Americans to leave the Far East. All the missionary work of the years, the growth of the Korean Church seemed at an end; then followed the dark years of the Second World War.

Liberation came to Korea in 1945; we returned to live in Seoul in 1948. The country had been drained of its resources by the Japanese war effort. The city was run down; electricity came to our house for fifteen minutes in the evening, maybe; the water, for a while at four-thirty in the morning; we had coal dust for fuel. Countless refugees fled down from the North, many told us how they had had to sit in their darkened homes until mid-night fearful of a voice call-

ing the name for someone to come out; he would go without a word, never to be heard of again; four hundred ministers disappeared in those days.

But Churches were ^{now filling} filling with people; seminary classes were held in the vacated shrine building, without chairs, or desks, or heat. Bible Clubs were forming, especially in refugee Churches.

Then the Korean War broke out; it raged up and down the peninsula for three years, ^{in 1950} killing a million people, destroying cities, towns, and villages. An American official wondered if the country could ever recover. We few missionaries had relief work to do in Taegu and Pusan. Streets were filled with refugees, soldiers, orphans, widows; relief work went on in city and country Churches, refugee centers, military hospitals, orphanages (we helped form twenty of them in Taegu); seminary classes were held in the West Church in Taegu, most of the students had only the clothes on their back, and not much of that; Bible Clubs were organized here and there; the Churches were packed with their own people and refugees. The Truce came in 1953; our children had gone to America, Dorothy had returned to Korea; and we ^{were} ready for furlough that year.

Now let me speak of the missionary ecstasy. We returned to Seoul in 1954. The city Churches were filling with people, new, refugee Churches were forming. The Koreans had restored all the Mission Schools the Mission had founded, they told us they only wanted to carry on the ideals and the methods of the missionaries, and they allowed us to serve on their Boards of Directors; the Christian Broadcasting system was established, under Otto DeCamp; the Christian Literature Society took on new life, with the help of Allen Clark, Peter Van Lierop did a great work in Andong, and so on. The Churches began evangelistic campaigns with slogans like "Thirty million Koreans for Christ."

The Bible Club Movement grew to about 70,000 boys and girls attending clubs all over South Korea; most of them from the poorest, and non-Christian homes. We received monthly reports from them all, published a monthly magazine, held teacher-leader conferences in Seoul and other parts of the country. It was especially exciting to attend Bible Club Rallies on Saturdays in the Fall Season in Seoul, and Taejun, and Taegu, and Andong, and Pusan and to see thousands of children conduct their Worship Ceremonial, lead their hymn singing, offer their sentence prayers, recite their Bible verses, and repeat together their Bible Club pledge to lead the four-fold Christian life in Luke 2:52. They then spent the rest of the day with their games and races, Olympic style! Some of them told their leaders: "This is the happiest day of the year for us."

The Theological Seminary now had a fine new campus and recitation building, and about 500 students. I was kept busy teaching 12, 13 hours a week, serving some time as dean, twice as acting president. Each year a hundred and more students would graduate in cap and gown and go out to serve as pastors, teachers, chaplains, and in course of time, as missionaries. Then it was even more exciting to be invited by many of them to speak in their Churches and at their posts.

One of the chaplains invited Dorothy and me to attend the Easter Service of his regiment; all the officers and men attended, including their new commanding officer. We were given memorial towels, marked at one end by the words: "WELCOME, COMMANDER KIM"; and at the other end, "CONGRATULATIONS, THE RISEN CHRIST." Then the chaplain took us up to the front line overlooking the enemy forces; as we climbed up the ridge through a trench we saw the pads where the soldiers slept and at each pillow as a New Testament and a hymn book. "But they're not all Christians, are they?" we asked; "Yes", the chaplain said,

* ~~My~~ Commander wants only Christians ~~here~~, they won't desert to the communists."

A chaplain invited me to preach in his penitentiary to an audience of 3000 prisoners.
It was a privilege to preach to the captive audience of three thousand men at the main Penitentiary at the request of the chaplain; one Sunday there were fifty men sitting in a row at the front of the auditorium, waiting to be baptised that day; some three hundred men partook of the Lord's supper; and the message? "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

From that day to this the Christian movement has been growing in Korea; a million boys and girls have attended Bible Clubs; Union Christian College has grown into Soong Sill University with 7000 students; Chosen Christian College has grown into Yunsei University with 30,000 students; the Seminary has grown from a hundred to 2,400 students. Today there are about twelve million Christians in Korea, and more than twenty thousand Churches; and the Koreans, and Korean Christians, and Korean Churches have overflowed into many parts of the world; there are about 2000 Korean Churches in this country, perhaps 600 of them in California. The most frequent remark I have made to Korean pastors and Korean Church people in this country is this: "When I first went to Korea I never dreamed that it would turn out like this."

FRANCIS KINSLER
January 13, 1904 - January 9, 1992

On completion of studies at Maryville College and Princeton Theological Seminary, Francis Kinsler went to Korea in 1928 as a missionary of the Presbyterian Church (USA). His early intention was to carry out evangelistic work with Korean co-workers in Manchuria and Mongolia, but political changes made this impossible. He was soon caught up with the rapidly growing church in Korea, teaching at the seminary in Pyongyang and preaching in the countryside. In 1930 he married Dorothy Woodruff, who has been his close and dedicated companion all these years.

The Presbyterian Church in Korea placed major emphasis on the preparation of spiritually dedicated and highly qualified ministers, and this became Kinsler's main assignment from 1931 to 1941 in Pyongyang and from 1948 to 1970 in Seoul and Taegu. His academic field was New Testament studies; he also served from 1952 to 1959 as Dean of what has been the largest Presbyterian seminary in the world. Among his publications in Korean are commentaries on the *The Gospel of John* and *Romans*, *The Temptation of Jesus*, and *Christianity and Democracy*. A disciplined student of the Scriptures, his notes indicate that he read through the Greek New Testament 180 times, many of them orally.

From his early years in Korea Kinsler saw the need to help young boys begging in the streets, so he created a program of basic education and Christian formation. Over the years this became known as the Bible Club Movement. The need for alternative education vastly increased after World War II and again after the Korean War; the Bible Clubs expanded all over South Korea. Many became recognized middle and secondary schools; for years their combined enrollment was over 50,000. It is estimated that one million young men and women and leaders have participated in the movement. For many this was their door to Christian faith and service.

From 1941 to 1948, during and after World War II, Francis Kinsler was pastor of First Presbyterian Church at East Hampton, Long Island, New York, and upon retirement from missionary service in 1970 he served as pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Center Moriches, Long Island. He and his wife Dorothy moved into the missionary retirement community of Westminster Gardens in Duarte, California in 1976. By this time there were hundreds of Korean congregations in Southern California, and many of the pastors were his former students. For the remaining years of his life he was called upon to preach in their congregations, teach in their seminaries, and offer counsel to their churches and presbyteries. Just three weeks before his death, he preached for the last time at Divine Light (Korean) Presbyterian Church in San Gabriel, where he had been preaching and teaching regularly.

Francis Kinsler held numerous positions on the boards and agencies of the mission and church in Korea. He received the Doctor of Divinity Degree from Maryville College in 1954, and he was awarded the Order of Cultural Merit from the President of Korea in 1965. In September of 1991 the first post-war class of the seminary in Seoul invited him back to Korea for their 40th anniversary.

Francis Kinsler came from a devout family. His father was a Presbyterian elder; his older brother Arthur is a Presbyterian minister; his sisters Marian and Helen served as missionaries in Korea and as orphanage workers in Philadelphia. He and Dorothy had three children. Their daughter Helen lives in Virginia; her three children, Bruce, Christian, Laetitia and their families live in the Eastern States. Son Arthur and his wife Sue Shin serve as missionaries with the Presbyterian Church in Korea; their children, John, Ross, and Elaine are studying in California. Son Ross and his wife Gloria serve as missionaries in Costa Rica; their children, Elizabeth, John, Paul and their families live in California and New Jersey.

