

# MASTER KEYS *to the* DOORS OF NATIONS

## Realities and Potentialities of Foreign Students in North America

**T**HERE is among foreign students in the United States a rising tide of criticism of the whole Christian movement. This attitude is perhaps as pronounced among Christian than among non-Christian students. Much of it is due to inadequate knowledge of the policies and achievements of the church at home and abroad, but this will not diminish the serious consequences of the indifference, distrust, or hostility of the young men and women who are flooding back to these lands every year. Many of them will, in the critical years just ahead, occupy commanding positions in politics, industry, education, and social movements; and the humblest student will be to multitudes of his fellow countrymen a trusted interpreter of American Christianity and civilization.

The following statements are based upon the observations and studies of the Committee on Friendly Relations Among Foreign Students, supplemented by partial returns of the survey now being made by a commission of representatives of missionary and educational agencies. These statements refer only to students from China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, India and Latin America. A large majority of students from non-Christian lands are non-Christians, except the Koreans, nearly all of whom register as Christians. The percentage of Chinese Christians is probably a little larger than the Japanese, while the Indian Christians are a very small minority. Latin-American students come from predominantly Roman Catholic lands, but their attitude regarding Christianity varies widely. The great majority are indifferent or antagonistic to the church. Perhaps ninety-five per cent of Filipino students profess the Roman Catholic faith. In arriving at this classification, the student's own declaration of religious faith is accepted. As always, there are wide fluctuations in the content of the term "Christian."

Workers among foreign students are very generally agreed that the loss of Christian faith in the Christian

group exceeds the gain among the non-Christians, which reveals the disturbing fact that down to this time student migrations from the non-Christian world to Christian America have represented a net loss to the Christian movement. The chief influences against Christian faith and experience while they are in our midst may be thus summarized according to their own testimonies:

- Separation from Christian teachers and activities of their native lands.
- Removal of the restraints of home environment.
- Shock and dismay at the paganism of American life.
- Disappointment in the churches and Christian people.
- Lack of Christian friendships and active religious interests.
- Superficiality and pleasure seeking of American students.
- Impact of new scientific and philosophical teachings.
- Misrepresentation of their own countries by press, pulpit, screen, stage, and especially by missionaries.

A disappointingly small number become Christians while in this country, while the number of those who lose their vital faith or drift entirely from religious moorings is alarmingly large. The largest percentage reached appears to be among the Japanese, but this has been chiefly through Japanese missions and churches.

The great majority of this student body are far removed from the influence of the church in America. There is a general distrust of the efficiency of the church and the sincerity of many Christians, the severest reproach coming perhaps from the Christian students. A somewhat careful canvass of opinion throughout the country reveals the following main grounds of dissatisfaction:

- Insincerity and hypocrisy of many professed Christians.
- Coldness and formality, especially toward foreigners.
- Dogmatic and conservative teachings.
- Sectarianism and wasted effort.
- Materialism in ideals and practices.
- Over-eagerness for popularity.
- Indifference of young people toward religion.
- Inadequate education and training of pastors.
- Strong organization at cost of vital power.
- Loss of influence in competition with other institutions.
- Failure to affect political, economic, and social life of the nation.

Much of this antipathy arises from generalizations on insufficient personal observation, but there is ample evidence of a situation that is damaging the prestige of the church and seriously crippling the future usefulness of these men and women. Needless to say that glowing

tributes are paid to the church by many Christians and non-Christians alike, and there are many earnest declarations of loyalty. But only a small fraction of students from the mission lands attend church services with any regularity, and the most disappointing conditions are sometimes found not in the state universities but in Christian colleges. A student's attitude toward the church is often formed according to a first unfortunate experience with it or some of its people. Fortunately, many of the unchurched have come under strong Christian influence through professors or community people, especially in good homes.

All of our contacts with foreign students show that their judgment of missionary work among their people is prevailingly critical. Much warm appreciation is expressed for the achievements and devotion of missionaries, but even this is often restricted to certain forms of work—especially educational and medical—and is accompanied with reservations. Many give abundant credit for the pioneer service of missions, but believe the missionary should now give way to national leadership. Indian students are most severe, often indulging in bitter denunciation. The Chinese attitude is somewhat more favorable. Korean estimates are almost uniformly commendatory. Very many Japanese make no comment, having had no contact with missionary work. It is significant that there is little difference, on the whole, between Christian and non-Christian expressions among all these groups. Filipinos generally are not antagonistic to Protestant missionary effort. The complaints of their Protestant students are under three heads: discrimination against Filipino workers in position and salary, misrepresentation of the people by missionaries in order to arouse sympathy and obtain funds, and opposition of some missionaries to Filipino independence, presumably through fear of Catholic restrictions under an independent government.

A rather thorough inquiry brings out these frequent criticisms:

- Divisions and competition among missionary bodies.
- Arrogance and domination toward nationals.
- Denationalization of the people.
- Ignorance or disregard of national psychology, customs, and religions.
- Unfairness to national workers in authority and salary.
- Conception of work as a charity to inferior peoples.
- Dogmatism and conservatism in religious teachings.
- Unworthy motives of some missionaries.
- Frequent lack of adequate education and training.
- Taking advantage of economic needs to win converts.

Promotion of political and commercial interests of foreign nationals.

Lack of scientific and industrial educational work.

Failure to reach educated classes.

Mass methods of winning converts.

Creation of "a caste of Christians."

Failure to encourage national aims of people among whom they work.

The one sore spot with nearly all these students has been produced by what they regard as the partial and unfair representation of their people by missionaries in order to gain financial support. This feeling is practically universal, and, however right or wrong, it is the chief cause of the alienation of many of the best students. Christians are no less vehement than non-Christians in demanding the presentation of all the facts regarding their countries and the preservation of their self-respect. A professor of a Japanese imperial university now studying in America voices the judgment of many students in saying that "missions cannot succeed in a large way unless they are an international spiritual enterprise, based upon mutual respect." Doubtless many students are unduly agitated in this matter, but it is certainly a question for careful thought by mission boards and missionaries.

Most of these students need to be better informed concerning modern missions—their motives, recruiting and training of workers, polity, and administration. Many oppose the whole enterprise as foreign and prejudicial to their independent national development. If they are to become intelligent allies, they must be drawn into closer fellowship with board secretaries, furloughed missionaries, and religious editors. Members of the hostile wing should be tactfully exposed to facts and fellowship provided by missionary leaders, and the friendly wing should be enlisted in a nation-wide campaign of education through the churches and homes. The whole body of students should be reminded of the unselfish service of missionaries and should be challenged to give their lives with equal devotion to presenting the unsearchable riches of Christ. A program of interpretation and education is urgently needed if we are to check the rabid criticism and hostility of many of these students from the mission fields. We must avoid the impression of secret councils which adopt schemes to be projected upon these lands without their knowledge or consent. Every student returning home from America should feel that he is a comrade in a great international cooperative endeavor to establish a world fellowship of Christians. Such men will be the strongest possible assets to the Great Cause.

How 10,000 Students in America from  
Other Lands can Open or Close the Doors  
to the Christian Enterprise

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