PRAYER BELL

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BILLY GRAHAM IN INDIA

RAMABAI MUKTI MISSION INDIA

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BLESSING IN THE MIDST OF RIOTS

By Howard McMillen

It is a joy for me to write something about the Billy Graham meeting held in Bombay on January 20, because I believe it was in answer to prayer that our party of seven was able to reach Bombay in time for the service, and the Lord had a special blessing for our small group from Mukti.

The very week that the Graham campaigns were scheduled to start in India there was considerable unrest in Bombay State over the reorganization of States. In many places shops were looted, curfews were enforced, and public transportation vehicles were stoned and held up. On January 19 as we travelled to Bombay, our train came to a halt at one station. We were informed that ahead the wires had been cut, rails had been removed, and that it would be impossible for our train to go farther. A special train was being provided for those who wished to return to the city of Poona. We decided not to return, and about midnight our train began to move, proceeding cautiously, and we reached Bombay the following day just in time for the meeting being held for Christian workers, which over 2,000 attended.

To both the missionaries and nationals present, it was a great privilege and thrill to meet and hear Billy Graham and to join together in singing the old hymns of the church. To most of us, the theme chorus was new:

All your anxiety, all your care  
Bring to the mercy seat; leave it there;  
Never a burden He cannot bear,  
Never a friend like Jesus.

When this great evangelist looked out over the audience, he said that we looked discouraged. When news had come to him that the large night rally in Bombay was to be cancelled because of a curfew, he said that he, too, began to be discouraged, but then remembered that to be discouraged is never proper for a Christian. When the two disciples were on their way to Emmaus, they were sad because they thought Jesus was dead; but He was alive and is still alive today.

Dr Graham reminded us of Jesus’ promise to the Apostle Peter, ‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’. Billy Graham continued, ‘Here the church is on the offensive,
not the defensive. If we are on the offensive, the powers of evil will not prevail against us'.

Dr Graham said that while reading the Word of God, again and again he had recently noticed the words 'the day', 'that day', etc. 'What does it mean?' he asked us. 'It means Christ's return. A climactic day is coming soon. Until that day what is our task? Our main task is to win souls, to evangelize. In order to evangelize, we must have a revival, a revival that begins in individuals. To have a revival means paying a high cost. It means following the Lord, no matter what the cost'.

'If we are to be soul winners', he continued, 'we must: (1) Believe that all without Christ are lost; (2) Believe that Christ is the one Saviour; (3) Have a sense of the urgency of the need; (4) Pay the personal price; (5) Believe God to work; (6) Live a life of love to the brethren'.

After returning to Mukti from the meeting, one of our Indian nurses described the blessing received there by saying, 'Now I know what it must be like in heaven, for I was there while Dr Graham was speaking'.

A Jewish man who keeps our farm records and has charge of our animals of Mukti said, 'When I went to Bombay to hear the world-famous evangelist, I was completely changed and accepted Christ as my Saviour'. We request you to pray for this man, that he will have boldness to show his faith openly by being baptized, and that he might grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The following is an official report about other meetings held in India: 'In Madras more than 30,000 attended each evening. In Palamcottah the crowds ran up to 40,000. Kottayam had one meeting with over 120,000 present, all sitting quietly and in perfect order and representing probably the largest Christian gathering ever held in Asia. Delhi averaged ten thousand each night. The total registered decisions for the twelve main rallies held in India were 16,000. Of these about 60 per cent were first-time conversions. Most of these were from nominal Christian backgrounds, but there were also numbers of Hindus, Mohammedans, Buddhists and Sikhs'.

Dr Graham said that God has given him a burden for the people of India, and that he would like to return to this country sometime in the future. May God continue to use him, and in His time bring him again to India.
AN INTERVIEW AT SUNRISE

By Lillian Doerksen and Elsie Rohrer

Weeks of individual and united prayer followed the news that Dr Billy Graham was to visit India. Prayer was intensified as political riots threatened to hinder the blessing we longed to see in this land. When the day of the first meeting in Bombay dawned, the riots were at their peak; and many groups of Christians en route to the meeting were forced to return home when train service was discontinued. We had begun our journey the night before, but had been taken off the train in Poona when all trains were cancelled. We stayed at the railway station over night; and as we prayed together, we marvelled because we felt no disappointment. There was a quiet assurance in our hearts that God was leading us. Suddenly there was some excitement, and we were informed that one train was going through. We were allowed to go at our own risk with no guarantee of arrival in Bombay. After twelve hours delay en route, we finally reached Bombay that night.

When we arrived at the only hotel where we could get accommodations, we were informed that Dr Graham and
his team were there, but that we had missed the only meeting that had been held in Bombay. He was leaving by plane the next morning at dawn. We wondered if our hopes had been in vain, but, turning from the reception desk, we met a member of Dr Graham's team, who promised to arrange an interview for us in the morning. We retired to our room, and a surprise ring at midnight announced the unexpected arrival of Beth Stone to share our room and the blessing of the next morning.

At 6:15 in the hotel lobby, overlooking the morning sea, we had our sunrise interview. With a face serene and radiantly shining with the love of Christ, Billy Graham met us, and for awhile that lobby was transformed into God's sanctuary. A message for us and for our churches went to our hearts, as from God's Word he encouraged us to be patient in suffering, to continue to love one another, and to be steadfast in our faith. Leaving us with a glimpse of the wondrous glory of Christ's appearing, he commended us in prayer to the Man of Glory.

It was not only the power and zeal of his message that marked him as a man of God, but his humility also impressed us. This little meeting with us seemed just as important to him as the huge multitudes that later gathered in other places to hear him. When he heard that some of our Mukti women had gone without their grain in order to contribute its worth to the expenses of his campaign in India, he felt it important enough to have a member of his team record the story, though the contribution in material value was small.

The absence of any trace of disappointment because the big meeting in Bombay had to be cancelled and the joyous confidence that God was working in spite of riots there, unrest, and violence, revealed his perfect confidence in the will of God. He rejoiced in the warm reception received and was impressed with the unusual conference he had with the press. He was not faced with political inquiries nor with the usual inquisitive, personal probes, but only with searching, theological questions which were fired at him from the moment the interview began. Nor was this conference in vain, for at least one Hindu pressman sought and found the Lord that day.

The challenge given to the church of India to evangelize the masses of seeking souls has reached the hearts of many. May this spark kindled by the Holy Spirit mark a new era in the ministry of the church of India in these strategic days. May it spread from heart to heart until this land is aflame for Christ.
My windows are not large, but they reveal much to me day by day. My room is on what I call ‘Mukti’s Main Street’, because the church building is there. The road is not wide, but considerable traffic passes. Sometimes the smaller children rush past, fleet of foot, or groups of merry, laughing girls, all full of the sheer joy of living. The older girls and women pass in groups of twos and threes, all chattering happily. Workmen are continually passing backwards and forwards. On school days a stream of boys from the village, as well as many of our girls, pass by. The missionaries also join this traffic stream from time to time, as duty calls to different places. A pathetic little procession is often seen as a group of blind women passes. Headed by a sighted person, they walk single file, their hands on each other’s shoulders and bundles on their heads. One never sees these pass without an ache in the heart for them and a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of sight. On Sundays tiny ones to old people, all clad in bright dresses or saris, throng the roadway leading to the church.

The church is directly opposite. Its solid, grey stone masonry faces me always. There is no sign of decay in its solid exterior. Plain, strong, unpretentious; no spires raise their proud heads pointing heavenward; no stained glass windows claim the eye and soothe the senses with their soft, sunlit hues. The windows are just wired and barred recesses through which light and air are admitted. But for all this I am glad. To me it stands as a strong and permanent witness to the power and faithfulness of a God who honours faith and answers prayer.

I remind myself of the inscription on the foundation stone laid by Ramabai. Translated it reads: ‘Praise the Lord. Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts. That Rock was Christ—Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones (or columns), polished after the similitude of a palace. September 20, 1899’.

It seems for the time as though the great, stone edifice becomes transparent, and I see within a sight which will ever live in my memory. It is the sight of Mukti at worship.
What a strange thrill went through me, as on my first Sunday here I joined them! I sat down at the front of the church and looked back upon the sea of dusky faces. Row upon row they sat on the floor, away to the back where they faded away in the dimness of the light. The children in front looked like a bright, flower garden, with their many-hued garments and beribboned heads. The minister called to prayer, and in the soft stir that followed, those little forms knelt upright, and, with hands clasped, they reverently bowed their heads. Singing followed with a tune quite foreign to my ear, but sung with a joy and rapture that surely rejoiced the angels in heaven. Prayer and song and preaching followed in turn, until the close, when again for a few moments all bowed in silent prayer. Then at a given signal, they rose and filed out row by row, beginning at the front, until the church was empty. I am ever reminded of the retreating waves of the sea upon the shore as I watch this exodus week by week. It is all so quietly and reverently accomplished. Week by week I sit with them, not understanding anything that is spoken or sung or prayed, but rested and refreshed in spirit because of the consciousness of the sweet presence of the Lord.

But the vision fades, and the grey stone emerges again, and with joy I praise God for His church in Mukti, people gathered out to His Name and for His praise. Led by Pandita Ramabai and all those who have gone before, it is continually being builded into Himself by the Holy Spirit. I see again all those who so constantly pass my window, and my prayer is, as was Ramabai’s, that they may all be living stones, polished columns after the similitude of a palace, to the glory of His great Name.

But the gathering gloom within reminds me that the sun in all its golden splendour has disappeared beyond yon horizon. Automatically my hand reaches for the electric switch. It is not there. With a jerk, I remember I am in Mukti where electricity is a missing quantity. Who that has enjoyed the benefit and conveniences of electricity would wish to go back to kerosene lamps and candles? Yet here, night work is done in compounds, hospitals, and dispensaries by means of this uncertain illumination. Smelly, hurricane lamps are the order of the night. Much work and preparation have to be done in semidarkness.

Say not ‘electricity would be too costly to install!’ True, we shall need much money, a large plant, an electrician, but is anything too hard for the Lord? Again I look at that steadfast stone edifice opposite—a monument to unswerving faith—and unhesitatingly answer ‘No!’
Perhaps the Lord will give some of our readers the joy of sharing in this great project. As we all pray that the spiritual darkness of India might be dispelled by the preaching of the gospel, may we be led also to pray for this project, which would mean so much to all who labour here; and whatsoever He saith unto you, do!

My little kitchen window at the back reveals far-waving branches of bright, cerise Bougainvilia. They seem to say 'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it'. The work of our hands? Yes, they are always at work—hands of prayer, hands of patience, hands of gentleness and kindness, hands of comfort, sometimes hands of chastening, often weary hands, always hands of love in Christ. And when I think of the living stones being built up into that spiritual house, I praise God that He has established the work.

And there in the pale light of the moon, the grey, stone church seems again to tell me that the God of Ramabai is still today, as yesterday, the Same.

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