THOMAS FRANCIS CARTER

October 26, 1882—August 6, 1925

IN THE spring of 1921 China was threatened with another famine, and the call had gone out for volunteers to help in organizing emergency work and relief. As several times before, Thomas Carter had responded, and it would probably not have been recorded here but for a small event which happened at this time.

On his way up to Shantung he found time to read on the train W. J. Clennell's book, *The Historical Development of Religion in China*, and in his reading he came across the statement which inspired the opening paragraph in his Introduction to the present volume. He asked himself, Has this been proved? How much does the world know about the history of these four epoch-making Chinese inventions?

After the famine was over, he returned to the schools which had been his main work for the last eight years. But the spark from the passage in Clennell's book was soon fanned into a flame. A desire for more knowledge took possession of him; and in the summer of 1922, after spending another spring in bringing famine relief, by superintending the building of three hundred miles of dirt roads with famine labor and dispensing nearly half a million dollars in relief to thousands of destitute homes, he left his chosen work to begin a search for the buried story of the Chinese invention of printing.

Thomas Carter was born to a world vision. His mother, Hettie Dodd, first saw the light of day in Salonika, Turkey, and needed four languages for daily use before she was ten years old: English to her parents, Greek to the nurse, French in the school, and Turkish as it was needed here and there. After graduating from Mount Holyoke College, which was also the alma mater of Hettie

Dodd's mother, she married the Reverend Thomas Carter in 1874, and Thomas, Jr., was the youngest of her four children.

The crowded manse in Boonton, New Jersey, where he was born became the center for many international interests. His father had traveled widely as a young man; and the grandfather, Robert Carter, founder of the publishing house which bore his name, a man well known in the religious and philanthropic life of New York in the latter half of the last century, instilled in the lad a deep veneration for his sturdy Scotch ancestors. The letters, also, which came back to the manse from his mother's brother and sister, who had returned to Turkey to continue the work of their parents, had no doubt much to do in shaping his subsequent career. Both Dr. Dodd and his sister showed early a sympathetic appreciation of the spiritual inheritance of the people among whom they had come to live. Their letters created in the enthusiastic boy an impression of the value, interest and dignity of the cultural attainments of the far-away lands, and these early impressions became a dominant characteristic in the grown-up man.

Thomas Carter came to China for the first time in 1906. He was then two years out of Princeton and was making a world tour with three friends. That this was not to be a usual sight-seeing tour soon became obvious. The world problems and many new impressions and interests which met him at every turn became a challenge which made it increasingly difficult to follow the scheduled plan.

In Nanking he left his traveling companions to go into the interior. There was no train connection between Nanking and Hwaiyuen in those days, so he joined a party of Chinese carpenters who were making the tramp of one hundred and fifty miles overland. Friends in Nanking provided him with food and bedding and taught him a few Chinese words, which he had to make the most of with his fellow travelers, who knew not a word of any Western language.

This gave him his start. Although he did not plan to stay with his friends in Hwaiyuen more than a few weeks, as soon as he

arrived he secured a teacher and began his study of the Chinese language. He made exceptional progress the three months he was there, and after returning to America for his graduate studies he kept up a correspondence in Chinese characters with his teacher in Hwaiyuen. When he returned to China in 1910 to take a permanent position, bringing with him a Norse bride, he was able immediately to use the language he had begun studying in 1906.

It was the following ten years, spent in a small Chinese town developing and superintending a circuit of city and country schools in close association with the Chinese, which gave to him his understanding and appreciation, not only of the Chinese themselves, but also of that background which has made them what they are, the world's most patient, tolerant and truly cultivated people. He used to say "I came to teach, but I stayed to learn." The eagerness of the young for new experiences remained one of his most salient characteristics. He had no sooner arrived in China in 1910 than he took up as his most absorbing avocation a study of Chinese history, both from books and from his conversation with the scholars whom he met, who love nothing better than a discourse on their ancient lore. In the Chinese language he continued to prove himself a scholar of rare merit. To this study, with its great difficulties, he took a joyousness of spirit which made a play of that which to another became a tiresome, nerve-racking task.

He was an incorrigible enjoyer of life. Wherever he went, associating with the unlettered farmer or the learned scholar, he would return with his vivid tales of new knowledge and interesting experiences. Masefield says in his introduction to *Marco Polo* that it is only the wonderful traveler who sees "a wonder." China was to Thomas Carter a never-ending wonder. When he first came in contact with the Chinese farmers he was amused to find that their children knew more about the seasons and various harvests, about grains and animal husbandry, than he did with his Princeton Phi Beta Kappa, *cum laude* and three years of graduate studies. He found in these simple folk who had never looked inside a book a veneration for learning which well matched that of his own Scotch

ancestors. And when he came to have business dealings with them, he discovered an astuteness and penetration in sizing up a person or situation sometimes superior to his own slow, detached understanding of everyday life. He discovered that the best training for life is not necessarily twenty years spent with books.

A social structure which is built on the family and in which for twenty-five hundred years learning has been the only road to distinction could not but strike a harmonious chord in this son of Scotch forbears. And in return there was something in his cheerful countenance, well-bred manners and instinctive consideration for the sensibilities of another which immediately brought him into sympathetic touch with the Chinese people. To him there was no baffling Oriental psychology to puzzle out. He discovered from the start the intensely human quality in the Chinese, a quality to which he felt himself closely akin. His friendliness, intellectual brilliancy and integrity, as well as a social inheritance which made it natural for him to consider the manner of human intercourse an important thing in life, were all characteristics revered by the Chinese from time immemorial.

In the Introduction the story is partly told of the research which resulted in the present volume. After Mr. Carter left China it kept him in Europe for more than a year and took him from one to another of the European centers of learning in a quest for new material, for new pieces to complete the picture of the Chinese invention of printing, which up to this time had been practically unknown outside of China. Although happiness was ever one of his most lovable characteristics, never did it abound as at this time. Many of his rare gifts, of which during years of altruistic, selfless service for others he himself had hardly been aware, were given new value in the preparation of this book.

While in Europe he accepted a call to join the staff of the Department of Chinese in Columbia University, and in 1924 he became its executive head. In teaching he found his fullest expression. His own eagerness to learn, infectious enthusiasm and conscientious attention to detail were communicated to his

students, and his classes became research laboratories where everyone contributed to the common aim. During his long illness in the spring of 1925 the students in his group studying Chinese Civilization decided to conduct their own classes under such leadership as he was able to give them from his sick-bed. The work was a great success. There was no dwindling in number, nor falling off in attendance. Several of his students from this period who had started their study without a definite aim are today making the interpretation of the East to the West the major part in their teaching and research. For beside the scholarly incentive—the natural satisfaction which came to him in finding all his intellectual faculties used to their utmost capacity in this research—there was another silent dynamic, which expressed itself in a desire to break down by intelligent knowledge the barriers which prevented an understanding between the East and the West. He had come to feel that there was as great a need for an interpretation of the civilization of the East to the West as for the West to have its interpreters in the East.

The spiritual depression which followed the World War had been fatal to many ideals for international coöperation and understanding. Old values had become discredited, and new values which could help to secure a more lasting peace were looked for everywhere. In facing this need the conviction came to him that only in the consideration and respect of each for the other's cultural attainments could the East and the West be brought to a better understanding. It was with this ideal before him that he accepted the call to Columbia University, and it was this ideal, as much as his scholarly ambitions and interests, that gave to the world the history of the Chinese invention of printing, which became his parting gift to the life which he loved so well. For he was stricken with a fatal malady while the book was still in the press and passed away a few days after he had seen the completed volume.

With the first printing exhausted, it became necessary to decide whether to reprint the book or to wait until further research could

bring new light on its problem. Mr. Carter himself considered this volume as only the first results of a research which he intended to carry much farther. As very little new material about the invention of printing in China has been published since his death more than five years ago, it has been considered better to reprint the book as it was left by Mr. Carter and not to attempt a revised edition at this time. A correction has been made on page 12, and on pages 273 and 274 some titles, for which I am indebted chiefly to Dr. Berthold Laufer, have been added to the Bibliography.

D. C. M.

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