

Report (for 1940 to the SPG in London) of the Reverend Charles Hunt, diocese of Korea.

A report is due to the Society from me for the year 1940. I am sorry it could not be written in Korea but circumstances prevented me from writing a report and had I written it most likely the Japanese postal authorities would not have allowed it to reach you.

The first 5 months of 1940 I spent at Sangju in the Southern part of the diocese of Korea. The reverend G E Hewlett was at Sangju in charge until February when he left on furlough. The Bishop asked me to take charge of the station for a few months and in February I was appointed Vicar Rural for the Southern area of Korea. Sangju is a pioneer station sponsored by SPG. I was the only 'foreigner' in the town and district and therefore suspect since Sangju and district is marked out as a place for secret shadow factories and munition works. Already a small arms factory was working at Sangju and this made a Britisher doubly suspect and only by walking warily could I escape the clutches of the military police and their spies. I was not supposed to know their secrets and heartily wished I did not know.

Our mission compound at Sangju was quite an attractive place with the makings of a charming garden by Father Hewlett. The little church of Saint Nicholas is an outpost of our mission. A small congregation had grown up around the church and there was a steady flow of inquiries in the town but it was utterly impossible to get a move on or have any contact with neighbouring villages. I can recall some very good mission services on Sunday evenings in Lent of last year when a number of inquiries came. A very well kept Holy Week and Easter with 2 adult baptisms on Easter Eve and everyone on the list made his confession and communion at Easter. An excellent little Sunday school of 30 or 40 children mostly heathen was conducted by the catechist. The inquiries came from interesting occupations: a young silver smith and his wife and mother; a young mechanic from a gold mine a youth employed at the law courts and a young merchant who had lived in Japan and had filled his mouth with gold teeth. The assistant station master was a Christian, his wife a better one, but he was moved away last spring to another station in the South of Korea. The friendly young postman would come and chat on my veranda enjoying a view of the garden. An unfriendly Japanese spy I tried to capture by a gift of daffodils or a cup of tea. But Sangju was an unfriendly place and became more so after I left and Fr. Varty took my place. Now there are no 'foreigners' at Sangju and poor Fr. Hewlett's dog, a little fox terrier, unless he has already been made into soup, looks in vain for his master and only the passion flowers bloom in the garden.

While at Sangju I visited for a few months a church in the centre of a Korea about 80 or 100 miles away approached over a pass and through some of the loveliest parts of Korea. The church of St. Benedict at Chongju was without a priest so until a Korean priest was appointed I did what I could from Sangju, going by motor bus over this pass or by train, a roundabout way of about a day's journey.

In June 1945 Fr. Varty came to Sangju and released me to go to Chongju which was the centre for the archdeacon for the Southern area of Korea. I took over the parish of Chongju from Fr. Choe Basil who had been transferred to the parish of Jeisan. Before moving to Chongju I visited all the mission stations in the Southern area, one of these places being Chin Chung where I lived for a year and a half shortly after my arrival in Korea 25 years ago. At Chin Chung is the Ain hospital, the place of work for many years of Dr Laws, now in the charge of a Korean Doctor. It was part of my work as Archdeacon to supervise the work of this hospital and living at Chongju I was in reasonable reach of the hospital although the delicate political situation did not allow me frequent visits to the hospital. Fr Joseph Kim whom I have known as a boy and student of our boys hostel in Seoul was in charge of the

hospital when first I took over the supervision but he did not remain long at the hospital, leaving in June for a post in the capital. During his residence at Chin Chun he had done good work and was a faithful Christian doctor. He was succeeded by Dr. Barnabas Kim who had been doing locum tenens for Dr Borrow at Yeosu. Dr. Barnabas Kim during his few months work at Chin Chun largely increased the number of patients at the hospital and did splendid work but he in turn left at the end of November to take over Saint Anne's hospital at Yeosu on Dr. Borrow's departure for South Africa. My connection with Chin Chun hospital ceased at the end of November when I handed over my work as vicar rural and archdeacon to Fr. Joseph Im of Chin Chun

The work in the Southern Archdeaconery was carried on steadily by several Korean priests in charge of 6 or 7 districts in that area. At Chongju Fr Paul Kim came to work as priest in charge after 6 or 7 years work as priest in charge of the Korean congregation in Seoul. Chongju badly needed a priest since the town is one of great importance and the work of the church was growing speedily in the outlying villages. Fr. Paul Kim is a keen and able priest and already when I left Fr, Paul Kim had revived the work and had sought out and visited many scattered Christians. In the other stations of Chin Chun, Eumsong, Jaisong (I have already mentioned Sangju) the work was being carried on faithfully under difficulties with a very steady flow of inquiries although I think in most places the attendance of men at church left much to be desired. It was becoming more and more difficult for men to attend religious services or have any connection with the church and such men as were employed by local government bodies were closely watched and prevented from attending Christian worship. At Chunan under a very capable priest Fr. Ko Paul the work was being consolidated and had every promise of going ahead. The church in Korea expects much and should receive great help from Fr. Ko Paul in the future. He is one of the ablest priests and before ordination he had been employed in various government schools and offices.

At Chongju where I lived there was a small but faithful body of Christians. Unfortunately during 1939-1940 many families had moved away owing to the fact that Chongju being the capital of the province many and frequent changes took place in government offices. Chongju is a town of 20000 people with provincial government offices, many high schools and factories. Our church site – a long and capacious hill – was on the edge of the town overlooking a great Shinto shrine, one of the largest in the country. This was unfortunate and especially so since the only person living in sight of the shrine and overlooking it was an English priest. I had no idea as to the extent of shrine worship and how far it was being pressed until I lived at Chongju. I was able to watch daily the constant procession of people to the shrine, parties of school boys and girls, officials and country people, all being driven and dragooned into attendance. It seems that every Sunday and holiday our few Christian folk were marched off for Shinto worship. It was also expected of us every first Sunday in the month or on special and frequent occasions to perform a rite under the flag staff on the hill outside of our church doors. Under the flag staff we stood, bowed to Tokyo where the emperor resigns, said the Miami creed, three clauses of loyal declaration promulgated and originally drawn up by the Governor-General of Korea. A good deal of trouble had arisen over shrine worship at Chongju between the local government authorities and the American Presbyterian mission. Bible schools and other kinds of religious institutions had been closed down by the police and there were frequent arrests of Korean workers and leaders of the Presbyterian mission and relations were very strained. I found it impossible to make any forward movement and as time proceeded I became more and more aware that I was suspected of being a spy and I could not without difficulty and hindrance visit the few outstations under my charge. My church worker – a splendid mission woman and my servants were outstanding in patriotic works and were certainly leaders in many organisations, yet this did not remove suspicion and they were frequently under question by

the police. The church of St Gregory at Chongju is a very fine Korean building but that and the whole church site must be an eyesore to the Japanese authorities since we obscure the shrine on the South side and the road has to pass at the foot of our hill.

Towards the end of summer it became impossible for me to preach or to teach in public and I was left completely alone on the top of the hill and apart from the church services I saw no one and no one came to see me. Surrounded by a forest of trees I had for my companions the golden oriole, a glorious bird which sang from June until mid-September even through the endless rains of summer, one chipmunk, a golden necked pheasant and a very small mouse in my room. Occasionally a snake would cross my path on the hill but looking out over the town I felt it all utterly unfriendly and could recall no kindness of any kind except perhaps that of the Korean man who sold me scraps of chicken which kept me alive. When I left to go to Seoul at the bidding of the Bishop, a detective accompanied me from my house to the railway station and I was not allowed to say goodbye to the few Christian folk or to my servant or church workers.

My time in Seoul before leaving with the Bishop apart from assisting with services in the Cathedral was spent in burning stacks of mission correspondence which had accumulated for 50 years, old ledgers etc. and helping to remove the Landis library from our premises to the Chosen Christian College. Pestered by spies, life became utterly intolerable and the presence of Britishers a stumbling block to the Christians.

Christmas was a holy if not a happy time. There was a feeling of primitive Christianity about the services such as the early Christians must have had in the catacombs but no outside festivities were allowed and we were warned on Christmas Eve by the police that the following day was the anniversary of the death of the emperor Taisho and therefore must be kept with fitting solemnity.

On Sunday January 19th the bishop celebrated at the High Altar for the last time and I assisted him at the Communion and acted as precentor for the music of the Mass. It was a dark cold snowy morning but the congregation was a large one and there were over 100 Communions. We were not however able to say Goodbye after the service and the Christians left quietly for their homes. The next day we left the capital en route for Japan and a few servants and others who dared to come to the station were taken note of by the police. Fr. Yokochi, a Japanese priest, dared to meet the train at Busan and received the Bishop's blessing while spies watched him at very close quarters and doubtless questioned him afterwards.

As to my own departure I had no choice in the matter. I had hoped to stay at least for several years further service, but as one under authority I had to leave. The nightmare of the Atlantic crossing was not so disturbing as the experience of the last few years in Korea. It may be that I can return some time to the Far East if it be the divine pleasure. It is my belief that the Church in Korea will pull through, that the priests will rise to the occasion and that the Koreans and Japanese will be faithful to the cause of Christ.

A Korean farmer who had been a Christian for nearly 40 years sought me out a day or 2 before I left Chongju, and expressing his sorrow said nothing would disturb his faith in God, that he thanked the missionaries from the West from the bottom of his heart for without them he would never have known the love of God, the means of grace and hope of salvation. He had brought in his harvest offering but the poverty now in Korea is so great that he appeared with his feet bound in old rags, not even straw shoes being obtainable.

I wish to thank SPG for all the assistance and sympathy shown to me. I should like to feel that for many years to come I could continue to be a humble servant of the society.

Yours very truly
Charles Hunt

