



Letters from Lottie

THE LETTER THAT STARTED IT ALL

The following letter, written by Lottie Moon on Sept. 15, 1887, was printed in the Foreign Mission Journal in December of that year. It is credited with providing the impetus for the creation of a Southern Baptist offering to support international missions, which later became the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

In a former letter I called attention to the work of Southern Methodists women, endeavoring to use it as an incentive to stir up the women of our Southern Baptist churches to a greater zeal in the cause of missions. I have lately been reading the minutes of the ninth annual meeting of the Woman's Board of Missions, M. E. South, and find that in the year ending in June, they raised over sixty-six thousand dollars. Their work in China alone involved the expenditure of more than thirty-four thousand dollars, besides which they have missions in Mexico, Brazil, and the Indian Territory. They have nine workers in China, with four more under appointment and two others recommended by the committee for appointment. I notice that when a candidate is appointed, straightway some conference society pledges her support in whole or in part. One lady is to be sent out by means of the liberal offer of a Nashville gentleman, to contribute six hundred dollars for travelling expenses. A gentleman in Kansas gave five thousand dollars to build a church in Shanghai in connection with woman's work there.

The efficient officers of this Methodist Woman's organization do their work without pay. Travelling and office expenses are allowed the President of the Board of Missions. This money is to be used at her discretion in visiting conference societies that are not able to pay her expenses. Office expenses alone are allowed the Corresponding Secretary and her assistant, and also to the Treasurer. A sum is appropriated for publications, postage, and mite boxes. The expenses for all purposes are less than seventeen hundred dollars. In a word, Southern Methodist women, in one year, have contributed to missions, clear of all expenses, nearly sixty-five thousand dollars! Doesn't this put us Baptist women to shame? For one, I confess I am heartily ashamed.

I am convinced that one of the chief reasons our Southern Baptist women do so little is the lack of organization. Why should we not learn from these noble Methodist women, and instead of the paltry offerings we make, do something that will prove that we are really in earnest in claiming to be followers of him who, though he was rich, for our sake became poor? How do these Methodist women raise so much money? By prayer and self-denial. Note the resolution unanimously approved by the meeting above:

Resolved, That this Board recommend to the Woman's Missionary Society to observe the week preceding Christmas as a week of prayer and self-denial. In preparation for this,



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Resolved, That we agree to pray every evening for six months, dating from June 25, 1887, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Woman's Missionary Society and its work at home and in the foreign fields.

Need it be said, why the week before Christmas is chosen? Is not the festive season when families and friends exchange gifts in memory of The Gift laid on the altar of the world for the redemption of the human race, the most appropriate time to consecrate a portion from abounding riches and scant poverty to send forth the good tidings of great joy into all the earth?

In seeking organization we do not need to adopt plans or methods unsuitable to the views, or repugnant to the tastes of our brethren. What we want is not power, but simply combination in order to elicit the largest possible giving. Power of appointment and of disbursing funds should be left, as heretofore, in the hands of the Foreign Mission Board. Separate organization is undesirable, and would do harm; but organization in subordination to the Board is the imperative need of the hour.

Some years ago the Southern Methodist Mission in China had run down to the lowest water-mark; the rising of the tide seems to have begun with the enlisting of the women of the church in the cause of missions. The previously unexampled increase in missionary zeal and activity in the Northern Presbyterian church is attributed to the same reason the thorough awakening of the women of the church upon the subject of missions. In like manner, until the women of the Southern Baptist churches are thoroughly aroused, we shall continue to go on in our present "hand to mouth" system. We shall continue to see mission stations so poorly manned that missionaries break down from overwork, loneliness, and isolation; we shall continue to see promising mission fields unentered and old stations languishing; and we shall continue to see other denominations no richer and no better educated than ours, outstripping us in the race. I wonder how many of us really believe that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'? A woman who accepts that statement of our Lord Jesus Christ as a fact, and not as impractical idealism, will make giving a principle of her life. She will lay aside sacredly not less than one-tenth of her income or her earnings as the Lord's money, which she would no more dare to touch for personal use than she would steal. How many there are among our women, alas! alas! who imagine that because Jesus paid it all, they need pay nothing, forgetting that the prime object of their salvation was that they should follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ in bringing back a lost world to God, and so aid in bringing the answer to the petition our Lord taught his disciples: Thy kingdom come.

L. Moon.