

The
SILENT BILLION SPEAK

by FRANK C. LAUBACH

NEW AND EXPANDED EDITION



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FRANK CHARLES LAUBACH has been a missionary to the Philippine Islands since 1915. He was born in Benton, Pennsylvania, and is a graduate of the Benton High School and Perkiomen Seminary. He received his A.B. at Princeton University and his Ph.D. from Columbia University. Upon his graduation from Union Theological Seminary in New York he became an ordained minister of the Congregational Church.

When first sent to the Philippines by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Dr. Laubach was assigned to general missionary work in Mindanao. Thus there were laid at once the foundations of his friendship with the Moro people, and among them he has since lived except for a term of service on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in Manila.

At his station in Dansalan on Lake Lanao in northern Mindanao, Dr. Laubach founded in 1930 the Maranaw Folk Schools, and, as a part of his mission of interpreting Christianity among the half million Moslems under the American flag, began to reduce their language to a simple form of writing and to teach adults to read. The story of a worldwide campaign against illiteracy, which grew from that beginning, is the story unfolded in this book.

Dr. Laubach was in the United States on furlough when the Philippines were occupied by the Japanese in 1942, and in the interval he has been cooperating with both private and public agencies in the effort to extend literacy among adults in Mexico, the West Indies, and Central and South America.

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Foreword

IN THE summer of 1941 I spent a fortnight in Hawaii waiting for the Clipper to take me to the Philippines. The single experience that helped me more than any other to prepare for the long world journey ahead of me came through a morning's conversation with Frank Laubach on the veranda of a little cottage outside of Honolulu where he happened to be staying for a short time. This remarkable spiritual leader opened his heart and mind to me concerning his faith and purpose and vision. It was here that I came to see the plan for world literacy, not as a detached project or a fantastic dream, but as a practical statesman-like venture motivated by a consuming passion for the Truth that would make men free.

Frank Laubach will tell you his story in these pages. It is a tale of adventure, a demonstration of endurance, and a testament of faith. It contains the key to a new world order. This is not too strong a statement, for the world conflict is basically a war of ideas. How can men learn without a teacher? How can they think if, seeing, they do not understand? If the struggle of today is to free the oppressed millions, of what value is it to liberate their bodies and not release their minds? A Christian victory and a righteous and durable peace will come only as the mind and soul of a weary and broken world are fed upon "what-

soever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

The Foreign Missions Conference of North America, in which one hundred twenty-one boards and societies of the United States and Canada cooperate in the world Christian mission, counts the goal of world literacy and the influence of Christian literature a major task, an unlimited opportunity, and a tremendous and far-reaching force for the building of the kingdom of God. Frank Laubach is a special counselor and representative in this united effort, which, with the fruitful cooperation of other devoted workers, has resulted in campaigns for the eradication of illiteracy and the creation of Christian literature in the Philippines, India, and Africa. Since 1942 these efforts have been extended to the Latin American republics and the islands of the West Indies, and Dr. Laubach has made three tours in this area. The story of these visits and campaigns has been added to the text of the present edition.

Charles Tudor Leber, *Chairman*

*Committee on World Literacy and
Christian Literature of the Foreign Mis-
sions Conference of North America*

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CHAPTER ONE

After the Silence of the Centuries

THREE out of five of the human race cannot read nor write—this was the startling revelation made in 1927 by James F. Abel, of the United States Bureau of Education. In Asia and Africa alone over a billion people are illiterate, nine persons out of every ten—half the human race. This cold type cannot tell you what that means. You think it is a pity they cannot read, but the real tragedy is that they have no voice in public affairs, they never vote, they are never represented in any conference, they are the silent victims, the forgotten men, driven like animals, mutely submitting in every age before and since the pyramids were built. It is a human weakness not to become aware of suffering unless we hear a cry. The illiterate majority of the human race does not know how to make its cry reach us, and we never dream how these millions suffer.

The most bruised people on this planet, the naked, the hungry, the fallen among thieves, the sick, the imprisoned in mind and soul, are the twelve hundred million illiterates,

three-fifths of the human race. At least a billion are virtual slaves. Take India for illustration. She had over three hundred and forty millions of illiterates at the time the 1941 census was taken, 88 per cent of her people; and almost every illiterate is in debt all his life—and his children and his children's children after him. He does not know how much his debt is nor whether the interest is correct. The money-lender takes all he can take and still keep his victim alive—for it would be silly to kill the animal that makes him rich! In one form or another this is the black sorrow of nearly every illiterate in the world. More than half the human race is hungry, driven, diseased, afraid of educated men in this world and of demons in the next.

I have not only seen these people across Asia and Africa, but have sat beside many of them and taught them one by one, and have seen a new light kindle in their eyes; love and hope began to dawn as they stepped out of blindness and began to read. I know that we could free this multitude from their tragic bondage; indeed, their emancipation has already begun.

The curve of literacy, which has been nearly stationary in Asia and Africa and Russia for centuries, has turned upward recently, especially in the past twenty years. A hundred million more adults read today than twenty years ago. If that curve follows its present trend, within fifty years we shall have five hundred million new readers stepping out of the silent ranks of illiteracy to speak for the first time. This is not only exciting news. It is the

most stupendous, the most arresting, and it may be the most ominous fact on this planet. Nothing can stop it now.

It will be wonderful or terrifying, depending upon whether these vast multitudes awaken with their hearts full of Christ's love or with their hearts full of hate. They will bless or blast the world. That is why the church must step to the front and take a leading share in the mighty upsurge of the sunken half.

We must not only help them rise but we must also put reading in their hands, the right kind of reading; and that is a staggering task. The literacy campaigns now under way are going to double the world's readers! In China and India, where through recent decades more than nine-tenths of the people have been illiterate, a mighty tide is now rising. Eight hundred millions in those countries alone will be reading before we are ready. Ninety-five out of a hundred Africans are still illiterate. But campaigns are starting all over that continent. Africa will be reading—before we are ready. A billion people now illiterate will be reaching out with hungry minds for something to read. Will they be fed with the message of Christ or with atheism? Will they read love or hate? Whatsoever is sown in their minds, the world will reap. And what will happen when these hundreds of millions shall speak "after the silence of the centuries"?

For ages Asia and Africa, with three hundred million more people than all the rest of the world together, have been sunk in apathy and stagnation. They followed in the footsteps of their ancestors, ignoring the rest of the world.

They believed it was wrong to break with any of the customs of the past. But with our imperialism, our business invasions, our missions, our radios, our airplanes, we have stabbed these peoples awake, and now the passion for progress burns like fire in their veins. They make more changes now in ten years than they used to make in a thousand years.

But as Asia and Africa attacked their enormous handicap of illiteracy they were confronted with a surprising difficulty. Modern medical science has been more successful than education. We helped them stamp out smallpox, cholera, bubonic plague, malaria, typhus, and other diseases that had kept their populations stationary, and now their populations are multiplying with ever increasing rapidity, faster than they can be educated. In India, between the 1921 and 1931 censuses, the number of literate persons increased by five millions, but the population increased by the staggering total of thirty-three millions, six times as fast as they could be taught to read.

This inability to catch up with their rising populations is making governments desperate. They eagerly welcome any suggestions that promise relief. It is here more than at any other point that they feel the need of missionary help. In India in 1939 every state, province, and presidency followed the lead of missions in establishing literacy campaigns. Those of us traveling over India in this cause found maharajahs, prime ministers of Indian states, college presidents, governors, Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Nehru, important leaders of all communities—Hindu and Moslem as well as

Christian—giving this movement their personal support and many of them attending literacy conferences conducted by missionaries. The leaders of Africa were equally cooperative. It was the same in China. Here is a cause in which every country believes. If the Christian church will help these countries out of their dilemma, it will win their cooperation and their hearts. I know many missionaries who are permitted to teach illiterates in prisons and other places that have been closed to them for any other purpose.

Teaching illiterates is proving to be a wonderful way to bring people to Christ. If you sit down beside an illiterate as your equal, your heart overflowing with love for him, and with a prayer on your lips that you may help him to a new vision; if you never frown nor criticize, but look pleased and surprised, and praise him for his progress, a thousand silver threads wind about his heart and yours. You are the first educated man who ever looked at him except to swindle him, and he will be so mystified by your unusual kindness that he is likely to stop and ask: "How do you expect to get paid for this? I have no money." Then you have your chance to say:

"I do not want any pay. I have learned this from Jesus. He spent all his time helping people free of charge. From the moment he awoke in the morning until he closed his eyes at night, he was looking around asking whom he could teach, or heal, or encourage, or defend, or save. I think that is a beautiful way to live. If we were all like Jesus, this world would be a paradise. So I thought I would try helping people just because I love them. And I

have discovered the secret of happiness! When I am teaching you it makes my heart sing. When I have finished teaching you, I want you to go and teach your neighbors. Don't take any money for it, and your heart will sing! Brother, we have found the secret of happiness."

He goes out and teaches others, his heart sings, and he learns to love Jesus. The only irresistible gospel is love in action—helping people where they are in desperate need. If we serve the illiterates and then tell them the gospel after we have won their hearts, they will believe in Christ because they believe in us.

Teaching illiterates is a means of extending the gospel, moreover, because every Christian needs to read his Bible. Wherever a church contains many illiterates, it feels weak and unhappy until it has taught them to read. It finds that illiterates just emerging from non-Christian habits need constant personal attention to keep them from sinking back into the old life. They could gain new power to overcome if they could read the Gospels, and hymns, and Sunday school journals, and prayer books. Moreover, illiterates have no influence with the educated people among whom they live. For these and other reasons it is universally recognized that literacy is a first objective in every Protestant mass movement.

LITERACY FOR EVERYBODY A NEW IDEA

The belief that everybody has a right to read and write is modern; it came out of the Protestant Reformation. In ancient and medieval times, perhaps one in twenty, per-

haps one in a thousand, could read. It varied in different countries. When the leaders of the Protestant Reformation taught their followers to search the Scriptures instead of consulting a priest, reading became a practical necessity for anybody who tried to be a first-rate Christian. Johannes Gutenberg met an acute need in 1450 when he invented moveable type, and thereafter every well-to-do home could afford to have a family Bible instead of only one Bible for a town or province. Then Luther, Tyndale, and other heroes flew in the face of orthodoxy by actually translating the Bible from sacred Latin into vulgar German and English so that people could learn to read it without learning Latin. Then came democracy with its radical teaching that everybody had a divine right to rule and therefore to have a little education. So democracy, Protestantism, and literacy are triplets. The first Sunday schools in England were established to teach people how to read the Bible and to do easy numbers. In Wales the Sunday school still teaches reading, writing, and 'rithmetic.

In the United States our literacy picture is still spotty. In various parts of the country illiteracy ranges from a low of 1.4 per cent to a high of 9.6 per cent of the population over ten years of age; and among certain racial groups in some sections as many as 22 per cent are still unable to read. In 1900 the illiteracy for our whole country was 10.7 per cent. Vigorous campaigns by government and private teachers reduced this to 4.3 per cent by 1930. Estimates for 1941 further lower it to 3 per cent. This is still higher than the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark,

Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, all of which claim less than 1 per cent of illiteracy. These countries had a simpler problem than ours, however. They can teach reading in half the time it takes us, because their alphabets are regular and phonetic, while our English alphabet is "confusion worse confounded."

Japan also has better literacy statistics than ours. She claims that her illiteracy is below one per cent. Nobody knows the genius who invented the Japanese *kana* syllabary a thousand years ago. There is a symbol for every syllable and these are arranged in perfectly logical sequence so they are easy to memorize. *Kana* was already waiting to make literacy easy when Admiral Perry opened Japan to the West in 1853. Japan soon started to take mighty strides in progress and education. Every registered child was compelled to go to school. The fact that everybody reads books and newspapers is one of the secrets of her power. No other country in Asia is over twenty per cent literate, while most of them are less than ten per cent.

WHAT JIMMY YEN DID FOR CHINA

The Chinese did not, until recent years, have an alphabet of their own. Their characters represented ideas instead of sounds, while our Roman letters represent sounds and not ideas. The Chinese talk in monosyllables, which not only saves their breath but gives them a language simple in the extreme. They have twenty-four consonant sounds to start off or end their words and sixteen vowel and diphthong sounds to use with consonants. Because of their use of monosyllables and the fact that some letters are never found except

at the beginning while others are found only at the end of the words, they can have only about five hundred words so far as sound is concerned. Fortunately, by using a variety of tones or inflections, they multiply this number to well over two thousand. Nevertheless, each word often has from ten to twenty possible meanings. Laugh at them if you will, only remember that we have some of these same troubles with our Anglo-Saxon monosyllables. For example, to ("to" has at least ten meanings) two, too; or do, due, dew; or u, you, ewe; or hew, hue, whew! We indicate different meanings by very bad spelling. When Chinese talk, they show what they mean by tones, and glides, and looks, and gestures. Obviously they cannot very well write tones and gestures with an alphabet. So they have shorthand pictures called ideographs—separate characters for every meaning of every word. A few years ago the Chinese did adopt an alphabet; it is useful to help illiterates to pronounce, but, as in Japanese, the characters have to be printed beside the spelled words to show what they mean. There is a New Testament in Mandarin with the words spelled down the left column and the characters beside them down the right column.

In spite of these difficulties of language, China, in the past quarter-century, has been the scene of one of the world's outstanding movements for literacy. It will always be associated with the name of Dr. James Yen, a Yale graduate—one of those brilliant Chinese who absorb all American has and take it back to China for the good of their people. In 1914, during the first World War, he was called to Europe by the Young Men's Christian Associa-

tion to work for the two hundred thousand Chinese laborers building trenches in France. "Jimmy" Yen started a paper for them, the *Laborer's Weekly*, confining his articles as far as possible to the thousand most commonly used Chinese characters. These thousand characters he arranged in four books, each book containing twenty-five lessons, with ten characters in each lesson. By learning ten characters a day, the student could master two hundred and forty characters in one month or all the thousand characters in four months. These lessons were so popular that the coolies began to think themselves lucky to have been brought to France.

When the war was over, Dr. Yen returned to China, where he found the illiterates in every province eager to learn his thousand characters.

One of the fine things about his literacy program in China was that at least nine different kinds of experiments were undertaken in different provinces at the same time, so that the results might be compared—how many were taught in a year, how much it cost for each pupil, how many enrolled, how many kept coming, and how long it took them to learn.

In Hunan Province, in 1922, Dr. Yen and the group of young experts whom he had enlisted in his cause began the campaign by trying to create what they called a "climate of willingness to go to school." They printed fifteen hundred posters picturing how China is hindered by ignorance. They distributed thousands of handbills urging education. The governor put up on hundreds of

street corners proclamations that the people must learn to read. A law was passed that every illiterate should be taxed until he had learned one thousand characters and could pass the examination. There were meetings of shopmasters. There was a general parade by college and middle school students bearing banners saying, "An Illiterate Is a Blind Man," "Is Your Son Blind?" "Can You Stand It to See Three-Fourths of China Blind?" They had huge mass meetings. Eighty teachers were recruited from the government and from mission schools; all they received was four dollars a month for transportation. Then seventy-five teams set out to visit shops, homes, and streets, and in three afternoons fourteen hundred persons volunteered to study—ricksha pullers, beggars, scavengers, fuel gatherers, pig buyers, and peddlers. Classes were opened in sixty places, sometimes two classes under one roof. Of the original number, twelve hundred stayed through, and nine hundred and sixty-seven passed the examinations.

Shansi Province, using equally original methods, raised its literacy by ten per cent in ten years, and several other provinces claim to have done as well. It is estimated that since 1926, ten million persons have learned the twelve hundred characters considered necessary for simple reading. The average cost for all China was \$1.40 per pupil.

The invasion of China by Japan in 1937 did not stop this mass education, but rather stimulated it. The whole program was taken over by what is called the People's Military Training Corps. In the city of Kweilin the boys and girls of middle schools taught their elders while they

were crowded into caves near the city during airplane bombardments. It helped keep their minds off their worries. Now they say that, thanks to the Japanese bombs, illiteracy has been wiped out of the city.

WHAT RUSSIA HAS DONE IN TWENTY YEARS

Far and away the largest literacy campaign carried on in all history has been that of Russia since 1921—though China and India together will teach seven times as many before their campaigns are finished! Russia under the czars was far behind other European nations in literacy. In 1920 her literacy was given as 31.9 per cent in government reports, but less than 9 per cent really were able to read intelligently, as they now confess. This illiteracy ran directly across Lenin's idea of government by the masses. On every occasion he placed literacy among the first necessities for a communist government. "An illiterate people cannot build a communist state," he said. "An illiterate person is outside the sphere of politics. The first thing he needs is to be taught the alphabet!"

In a dictatorship, things can be accomplished swiftly by government orders. Lenin began by ordering all spelling changed. Russian spelling had been as bad as ours is in English. A perfectly phonetic alphabet was adopted in place of the old one. The second change Lenin made was to teach the languages that people spoke. The old czarist government had refused to teach any but the official Russian language. Lenin saw that Russia would not be literate in a hundred years if he tried to teach only one