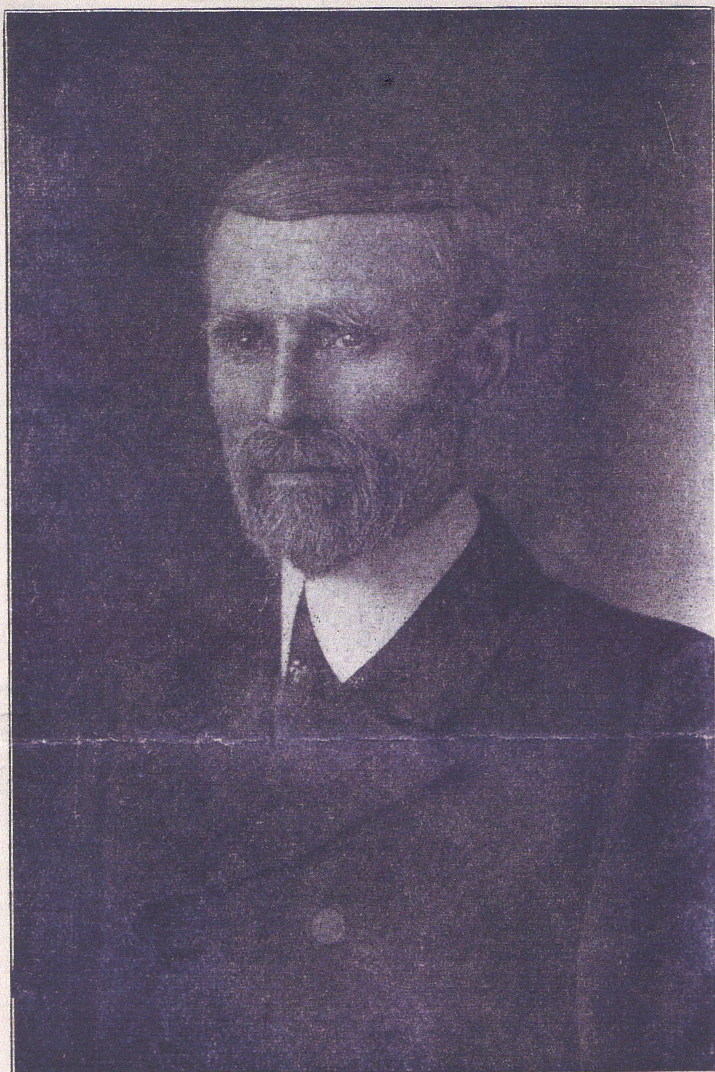


House-top Call on Farm in Iowa

BY ERLING NICOLAI ROLF SRUD



Daniel Nelson, who had the house-top call

WHAT Daniel Nelson saw from his roof-top thrilled him. Eighty acres of fertile Iowa farm land—all his! Each year now the land had yielded bountiful crops. Yonder in his pasture were the horses and herd of cattle. Beyond the barn were the pens of hogs, and his wife's flock of hens. Now he was building a comfortable new house.

Only a few years earlier he had come to America—a sailor-turned-farmer, with only enough money to bring himself, his wife and his baby boy to the new land. Contentment welled in Daniel Nelson's heart as he continued laying the shingles.

How fortunate he was!

He thought back to his family in Norway. His fisherman father had labored hard all his life. Still he had no more than his tiny cottage and the little patch of land beside the fjord. The neighbors there fished on frigid, stormy seas; each season there were some who did not come back. When he was fourteen years old, Daniel had gone with them on one fishing trip; he came back, almost dying from pneumonia.

Then for fourteen years he sailed over sea and oceans to the ports of many lands. In the company of coarse sailors he forgot his confirmation vows.

Three times he escaped death at sea, the last time off the coast of China. Struck by a typhoon, his ship broke to pieces. Daniel and his comrades clung desperately to floating beams and masts.

For a day Daniel was pitched and tossed. One after another, his exhausted mates sank beneath the rolling waves. In the morning when the storm abated there were only a few yet alive.

A sail appeared on the horizon. Chinese fishermen, attracted by the cries of the shipwrecked sailors, came near. They were not eager to rescue "foreign devils." But they tossed a rope to Daniel and other survivors who had managed to crawl upon a floating piece of wreckage. Thus the white men were towed into Shanghai.

For two years after the China Sea rescue Daniel worked on an American warship stationed in Chinese territory. In China ports and on brief trips inland he saw for himself the plight of the common Chinese—poor, often ill-clad and hungry, always the slaves of superstition.

Then home on a trip to Norway, Daniel visited childhood friends. He sat with them during their family devotions. Though no word was said to him of the godless life he was living, yet he left the house with remorse in his heart. And he fell in love with Anna, a daughter in that pious household.

He took to the sea again. But now he was ever troubled in spirit. On one ship he happened upon a New Testament and he began to read it. In London, at a seaman's church, he partook of communion for the first time since his confirmation day. That night, completely yielding himself to the Lord at last, he knew the "peace that passeth all understanding."

Not long after this he returned to Norway and to Anna. A new life, with Christ at the center, became his when he and Anna Sandvig were married on September 26, 1878.

NOW FROM his roof-top, Daniel Nelson, prosperous Iowa farmer, hammered the shingles into place, and thought, "How much more I have than the Chinese!"

So many of them had only a mud hut and a tiny rice field for eking



A gathering of women at the mission compound at the South Gate, Sinyang, China, at the time when missionaries were still at work there. Rev. Nelson was felled by a bullet in one of the upstairs rooms of this large building.

out a living. On the streets of Shanghai and Hongkong, Daniel had seen so many Chinese begging for food. Yet even greater than the hunger of their stomachs was the hunger of their souls.

He had watched them prostrate themselves upon the ground before idols of stone. Once he had heard of a baby girl tossed upon a rubbish heap to die because her parents wanted a son. The sick and the crippled were often unattended in the streets. How different in America and Norway where there were Christians who had compassion for those in need!

"Yes," thought Daniel Nelson, "how blessed I am that I have all these things here on my farm!"

Then like a clarion call in his heart came the challenge: "Sell all these things you have here. Take your family. Come over to China and help!"

Had he heard an actual voice? Could this be only his conscience speaking? Almost stunned, Daniel Nelson laid down his hammer.

He shook his head as if to rid himself of this fantastic notion that would wrest from him all the blessings that he knew on his farm. Resolutely, he grasped a shingle, laid it in place, and nailed it fast. But as he nailed with his hammer, he could not rid himself

of the challenge: "Sell all you have. Come over to China and help!"

He laid down his hammer again. With heavy heart, he recalled a funeral procession down the streets of a Chinese village. To have a grand funeral was one of the highest ambitions of a Chinaman. A funeral with firecrackers exploding to scare away the evil spirits. A funeral with paper money and paper food and a paper sedan chair burned so that the dead one might be supplied with needs in the frightening spirit world. No Savior, no promise of salvation, and no assurance of a happy eternity for the Chinese who yearned for such funerals!

Trembling, Daniel Nelson bowed his head and whispered: "Lord, if Thou wilt send me a buyer for my farm, I will go to China."

The load was lifted from his heart. With a certainty he could never explain, Daniel Nelson knew that upon his housetop he had heard a call from God.

For a long time he sat upon the roof, contemplating the joy of bringing the Gospel to superstition-ridden hearts in China. Then, leaving his hammer on the roof he climbed down the ladder to tell his wife of this call from God.

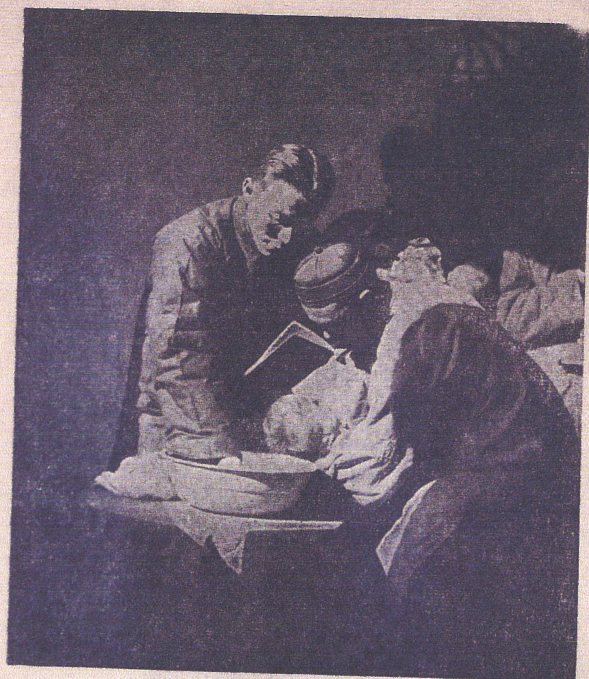
But when he saw her the words would not come. Instead, objections tumbled over one another in his mind. What a foolish man he would be to leave a farm where he could live in peace and security the rest of his days! What of his four children and his wife? What would happen to them in a land where white men were despised as "foreign devils?" What, after all, was he but an uneducated farmer? How could he do mission work? What right had he to expect his family to risk their lives with him in China?

So Daniel Nelson told his wife nothing about the housetop call.

The days dragged by like leaden weights. He could not bring himself to return to the roof to finish the shingling of the new house. His delight in the livestock was gone.

He read his Bible more than ever. He wrestled inwardly with his own will, and with what the Lord wanted him to do. The more he searched the Scriptures, the more convinced he was that God wanted him to go to China.

One day he finally summoned up courage to tell his wife. He was amazed when she replied quickly, "I will go with you, Daniel. I have known all along that something has been troubling you. You have not finished



Peng Fu baptizes a child. Peng Fu as a boy used to throw stones at the missionaries, but he was finally won for the Lord and trained by Missionary Knut Stokke. Rev. Peng Fu is now working in Hong Kong.

the shingling, you know. But I believe it is God's will for us to go to China."

Joyfully Nelson next went to his pastor and told him of his call to China. The pastor, however, shook his head and asked how a farmer over thirty years old with four children to support could think of going to China as a missionary. Furthermore, what mission society would send him? He was not educated as a pastor—how

then could he consider himself qualified to preach the Gospel?

Daniel returned home, disconsolate over the pastor's objections. After all, the objections made good sense, did they not?

Yet the housetop call would not let him rest. Whatever he did, wherever he went, there was the nagging thought: "Go sell all that thou hast and come follow Me."

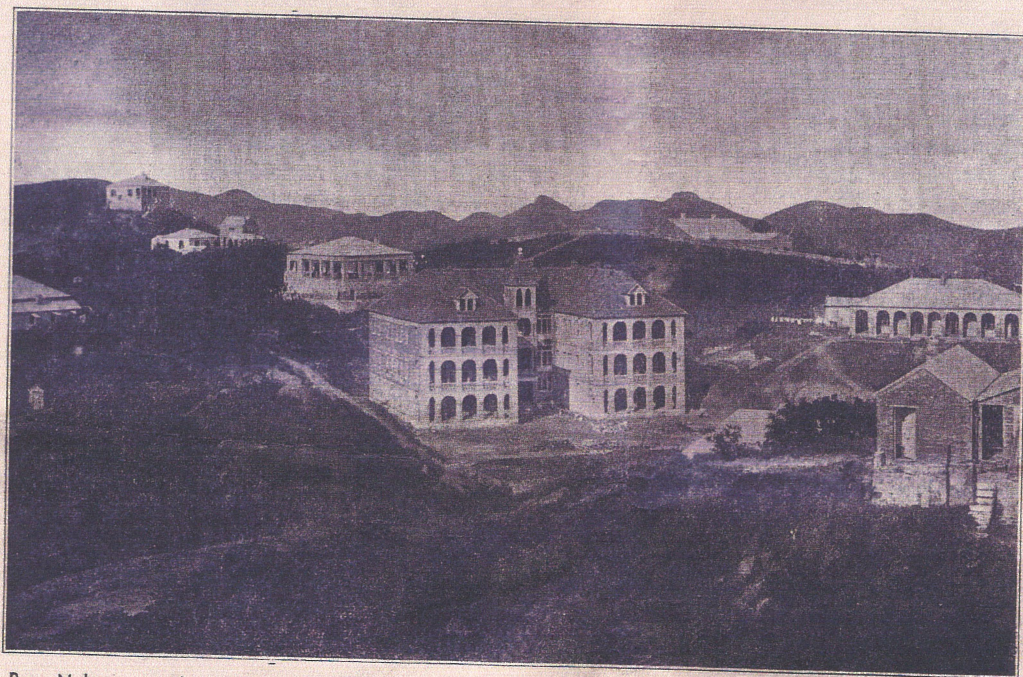
Why not sell all? Why not sell this farm, his livestock, his farming equipment—and use the money for travel to China, and to establish his own mission station there? Did not the Lord promise in His Word that He would supply all the needs of His servants?

Daniel went to a church convention and pleaded with the pastors assembled there for the establishment of a Lutheran mission in China. He promised to provide his own financial needs if he could go and establish such a mission.

But not one pastor would raise his voice in support of Nelson's call. Undaunted, the farmer decided to prepare himself for mission work. Leaving his farm in his wife's care, he studied for a year at Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis and at Valparaiso University, at Valparaiso, Ind. He was hopeful that such training would bring Church approval of his mission call. But no mission board or mission society would agree to send him to China.

Daniel Nelson returned to his farm at Eagle Grove, Ia., greatly discouraged. One day as he sat on a bench back of the Lund Brothers Store at Thor, Ia., he told the local pastor of his call from God. But this pastor too shook his head and advised Nelson to forget it. After the pastor was gone Nelson broke down and wept.

Seeing this farmer weeping, the



Rev. Nelson saw that missionaries who worked on the hot plains needed a mountain summer retreat for rest. He procured property in the mountains and a village was established, with a school, shown above, for the children of missionaries. This village of Kikungshan is now in the hands of the Communists.

storekeepers came out to inquire what troubled him. Brokenly, Nelson told them.

"If this is the will of God," said one of the brothers, "God himself will open up the way for you."

Nelson stood up, put his hands on the shoulders of the two men and exclaimed, "God bless you! You have given me the first encouragement I've had."

The brothers found a buyer for the farm. One of them auctioned the livestock, the equipment, and the household goods.

Then, while Nelson went to town to inquire about a passport and steamship accommodations to China, a neighbor came to Mrs. Nelson while she packed and asked her if she did not realize her husband was completely daft.

On November 30, 1890, Daniel Nelson and his family arrived at Shanghai, China. He was not ordained. He came without support from any church or mission society. A few friends gave him meager financial backing. But he was confident he was doing the Lord's will, so the Almighty would supply all his needs.

A five-day trip up the Yangtze river brought them to Hankow. At Wuchang, a city directly across the river from Hankow, Nelson rented a house as temporary quarters for his family. Here in the mud-brick dwelling the Nelsons settled for the winter and welcomed their fifth child, a son they named John.

Without delay, Nelson obtained a Chinese teacher. Mr. Tang knew no English; Nelson knew no Chinese. At first, the learning of the language was tedious and discouraging. But after a year, the new missionary had gained some command of the language—and his teacher had memorized the Gospel of John, and was won for Christ.

In the years following, Nelson many times was to encounter the persecution given "foreign devils." On his first trip to scout for mission territory, he was stoned. Once, pursued by robbers, he wriggled under a small stone bridge and hid. He slept in filthy, vermin-ridden inns and hovels as he traveled about. He was met with derision and mistrust by those whom he sought to help. Illness dogged him. Yet ever with him was the sure conviction that he was about his Father's business.

On March 17, 1895, he was ordained at Hankow, by Missionary Halvor Ronning and was accepted for support by the Missionary Society of the Norwegian Lutheran Church.

He moved to Sinyang in 1901 and established a new mission there. A year later, on Christmas Day, 1902, he baptized the first converts.

For a quarter of a century, the Reverend Daniel Nelson stayed at his post, alone at first, but later aided by other missionaries. In that time, nearly two thousand souls were baptized into the Christian faith in the Sinyang district.

Then in late January of 1926, Sinyang was besieged in a war waged between two Chinese war lords. But fighting and bloodshed were so commonplace in China, that at first Nelson did not put much stock in the rumors of threatening danger.

On the evening of January 24, troops entered the hills south of the city, and soon attacked the South Gate where the mission compound was located.

The nine missionaries there barricaded their windows with galvanized roof iron, sandbags and bricks. Day and night, they lived in darkness while bullets pounded and tore through the walls.

On February 3, during a lull in the fighting, Nelson scouted the city to make sure the missionaries in other parts of the city were safe. When he returned to his own mission compound, he found the yard jammed with a thousand refugees.

Sunday morning, February 7, Reverend Nelson preached to these homeless men, women and children while bullets whistled overhead. He urged them to be ready for eternity at any moment; to do this, they must accept Christ as Savior.

It was his last sermon.

The following evening, there was a sudden and terrific bombardment. Shortly after he had conducted devotions with his wife and Deaconess Christine Johnson, Nelson was killed by a stray bullet that had pierced six sheets of roof iron.

The next day, the Reverend Chu Hao Ran, the first native Lutheran pastor of the Honan province, brought a Chinese casket for the beloved servant of God who had left his good Iowa farm to come over and help them. The Chinese gathered about the

body of the farmer who had answered the housetop call, and one of them read:

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7-8).

I Met the Master

*I had walked life's way with an easy tread,
Had followed where pleasures and comforts led,
Until one day in a quiet place
I met the Master face to face.*

*With station and rank and wealth for my goal,
Much thought for my body, but none for my soul,
I had entered to win in life's mad race
When I met the Master face to face.*

*I had built my castles and reared them high,
With their towers had pierced the blue of the sky;
I had sworn to rule with an iron mace,
When I met the Master face to face.*

*I met Him and knew Him and blushed to see
That His eyes, full of sorrow, were fixed on me;
And I faltered and fell at His feet that day,
While my castles melted and vanished away.*

*Melted and vanished, and in their place
Naught else did I see but the Master's face.
And I cried aloud, "Oh, make me meet
To follow the steps of Thy wounded feet!"*

*My thought is now for the souls of men;
I have lost my life—to find it again,
Ever since one day in a quiet place
I met the Master face to face.*

—Anon