

My first encounter with Oscar Quillerby was on Taipei's Chung Shan North Road. It left me shaken and dazed, and calculating whether I had enough money to take the next plane back to Britain.

Other missionaries who have been 'Quillerby-ed', so to speak, all testify to the same reaction - those of them, that is, who are still capable of testifying coherently to anything at all. But the rather small number who did not in fact catch the next plane home have grown to love the man, in an odd sort of way, and indeed now regard their initial meeting with him as a trial of faith cunningly devised by the Almighty. On the flyleaf of many a missionary's Bible may be found, written in a shaky hand, some such inscription as 'Met Quillerby'; or, more frequently, 'Accosted by Quillerby', or even quite simply 'Quillerby', followed by the date and a string of comforting Scripture texts. In some cases the ink will appear to have been blotted by tears. Esther Sapone's Chinese New Testament bore the almost illegible words: 'Easter Sunday 1977. Oscar Quillerby. Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side'. And in Larry Pretzel's Bible, the inscription 'Oscar Quillerby! Dear God!' was written in what he self-consciously affirmed was red ink. I can only say it was ink of a kind I have never seen.

Recently arrived in Taiwan, not yet accustomed to the heat and the humidity, and unutterably depressed by my morning reading in Ryle's *Holiness*, I was trudging wearily along, when all of a sudden I was assailed by a piercing cry of, "Kill 'im! Kill 'im!" which almost brought my heart to a halt. I swung round to see a man leaping towards me like an Olympic long jumper, arms windmilling, legs flailing, a maniacal gleam in his eyes. He landed with a tremendous thud inches away from me.

"Got 'im!" he cried, lifting his right foot to reveal an enormous cockroach now catastrophically reduced to two dimensions. "Heh, heh, heh! One down and 750 thousand billion to go! Heh, heh! How do you do, Widsyth? Quillerby's the name. Spelt Q-U-I-L-L-E-R-B-Y but pronounced 'Killer-bee' like the vicious little Brazilian beastie. I saw the photograph in your College Bulletin; couldn't mistake a face like that in the bowels of a Roman galley, I said to myself. Heh heh! Welcome to Taiwan, my boy. The first ten years are the worst, but you'll do fine if you stick at it. Except that you won't survive unless you learn to kill cockroaches. Why on earth didn't you give him the flat of your sole, Widsyth?"

This verbal avalanche completely floored me. "I...I... I'm afraid I didn't see him," I mumbled. "Besides he wasn't doing any harm there on the pavement. I mean, it's not as if he was in my soup-plate."

"Not in your soup-plate, Widsyth? Not in your soup-plate! What kind of talk is this? Did we shrink from taking on Hitler because he wasn't in our soup-plate, Widsyth? Did we turn our backs on smallpox because it wasn't in our soup-plate? Did we run from..."

The Possum Spider

"I only meant... "

"Have the kindness not to interrupt, if you please, Widsyth! Doing no harm was he, eh? Why, there aren't words enough in Roget's *Thesaurus* to describe the villainy of this scuttling horror! Did you know he's a carrier of 14 diseases fatal to man - and of three more that are partly fatal?"

"Partly fatal, Mr Quillerby?"

"And of 29 more that will keep you crouched over a squat-pot for days on end!"

"But..."

"And in addition to that, at least 76 more that will have you bent over a bucket 18 hours a day!"

"But surely..."

"'Surely' is the operative word, Widsyth. It is an 'assured result' of modern scientific research. Dr C Winley-Bruntington has shown it to be so."

"And who is Dr C Winley-Bruntington, Mr Quillerby?"

"Why, only my cousin's brother-in-law's nephew, and one of the most brilliant entomologists in Asia, Widsyth. That's who! He says we've got to fight 'em, and by Jove, he's right! Fight 'em in the restaurants, fight 'em behind the curtains, fight 'em on the carpets, fight 'em under our beds, fight 'em in the lavatories, fight 'em inside the washing machines and beneath the refrigerators, fight 'em on the beaches, fight 'em on the landing grounds, fight 'em in the fields and in the streets..."

By this time a group of Japanese tourists had gathered round, smiling and taking photographs. Their guide was giving a running interpretation and soon they all broke out in polite applause. Quillerby, quite startled, flushed, smiled at the group, bowed low, and hurried me into a nearby coffee shop.

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