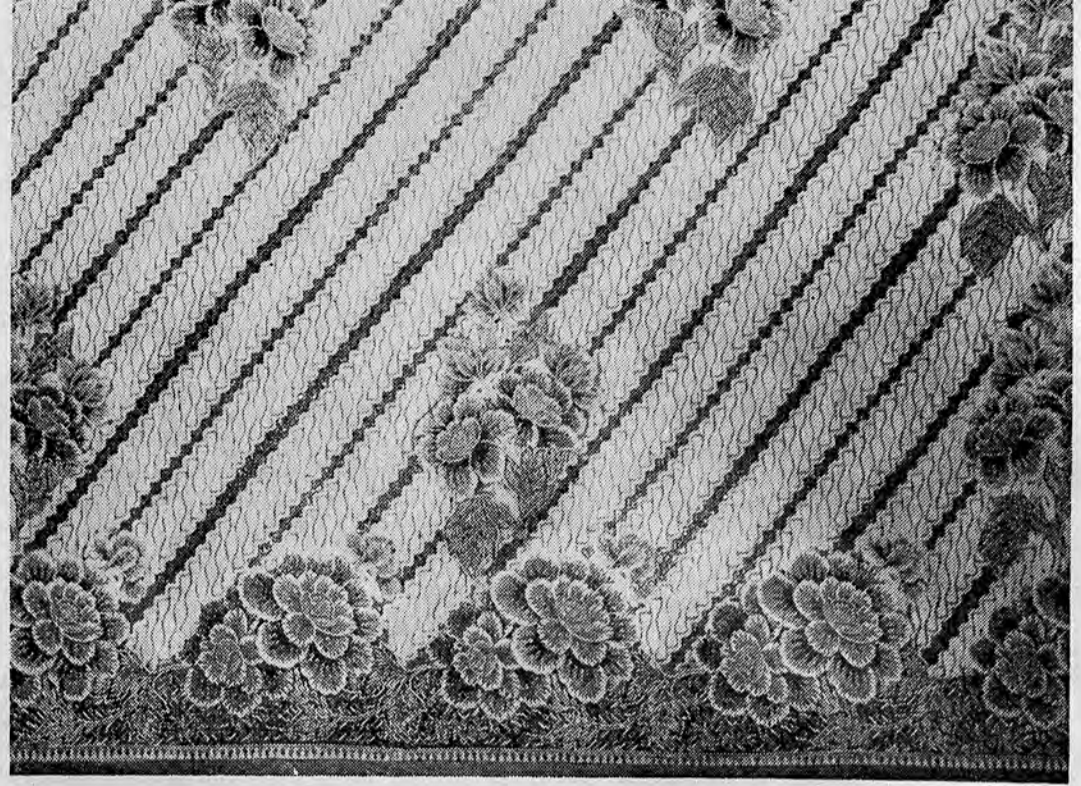


*Each batik pattern has its own distinctive charm and beauty. Some have multicolored floral patterns with brilliant birds on colored backgrounds; others have a more subtle form of beauty in the duller or less vivid patterns. Two elements are needed to produce the pattern—wax and dye; but the drawings must come from the artist's own mind and through his hand.*



# *The Christian Life Is Like Batik*

By Catherine Walker

**T**HE Christian life is like an eye-catching piece of Indonesian batik, the distinctive cloth which forms the skirts of the Indonesian women. As these women gather at the markets in the early morning their skirts form a mosaic of beautiful patterns.

Batik is the Javanese word meaning "wax painting," and it is a process used in coloring and designing fabrics. The pattern is the work of an artist.

The Christian's life is also the work of an artist, the Great Designer of happy, triumphant lives.

The purpose of an artist is to produce a thing of beauty, something satisfying to the heart of the artist himself and something that will be admired by those who notice the handiwork. The patterns are varied.

Some batik patterns are formed of tiny parts, others of large arrangements of birds, butterflies, or flowers. Some have squared, diagonal-striped, or geometric patterns. Others include tiny pinpoint dots or dainty sprays. Each is drawn by hand. No two are alike.

God, too, patterns the Christian life with unlimited variety.

Each batik pattern has its own distinctive charm and beauty. When I first arrived in Indonesia I was not

interested in the dark skirts but was especially captivated by those which had bright splashes of color upon them—multicolored floral patterns with brilliant birds on clean-colored backgrounds.

In time, however, the beauty of the dark brown and dark blue patterns of the old Javanese designs revealed their particular charm to me. Now, as I watch the skirts of the women passing to and fro in the crowds, I find that each has its own appeal. Earlier, I was only ignorant of the more subtle forms of beauty in the duller or less vivid patterns.

Thus, in youth many Christians see only happiness and success as the ingredients of a beautiful life; but in time one sees that God may permit the dark patterns of suffering and disappointment to be marked into a life, not to sully its beauty, but to paint into that life a new type of beauty.

**I**N Java the artist's selections are his own, though they are often limited by his training and are greatly influenced by the taste and traditions of his locality. Though each region has its preferred patterns, the drawings must come from the artist's own mind.

Two elements are needed to produce the pattern—wax and dye. The patterns are drawn with a hot mixture of beeswax and paraffin onto the

cotton cloth. The wax flows easily and sinks into the material. Then the cloth is submerged in dye. Where the wax is painted the dye cannot take effect. Then wax is painted into other areas and the cloth is submerged into other colors of dye.

The pattern the Heavenly Artist produces is one of his own choice. From a myriad of possibilities he selects the pattern best suited for each life.

The wax in the Christian's life is the spiritual truth that is written into a believer's heart either through personal Bible study, sermons, Bible lessons, spiritual books, or conversations, and direct experiences with God in prayer. All this drawing is the work of God in a heart. It is invisible. It is written in secret. No one sees the process. The receiving of God's messages into the heart is a private, individual, and personal matter. God does the waxing. He may use various channels or tools but he himself does the painting.

The dye that colors a Christian's life is the circumstances that sweep over a life—the everyday happenings. The circumstances may be the bright colors of health, success, and prosperity; or situations may bring the dark dyes of suffering, disappointment, and sorrow. Daily events will sweep over a life and submerge it. The mark that is left on the cloth of life, however, depends upon the wax



*The circumstances of one's life may paint the brilliant colors of health, success, and prosperity; or they may draw the dark patterns of suffering, disappointment, and sorrow in order to give a rare beauty of character. God does the waxing. Daily events submerge each life; but the pattern which remains depends upon the wax markings already written in the heart.*

markings that God has already written into the life.

For example, as a twelve-year-old I was startled and impressed when I read in the Bible, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings." My sister and I never considered any alternative when told to "do the dishes," but we vehemently fussed and argued regarding the distribution of work involved in washing and drying the dishes.

But when this verse (Philippians 2:14) caught my attention the dish-washing episodes were completely altered. God wrote his command in wax and the remembrance of it made even dish washing an experience free from conflict. The dye of household duties does not make the pattern of life drab if God has taught one the right way to view responsibilities.

One result to be sought after in daily Bible reading and daily private devotions is a message from God for that day—some thought that can be noticed, obeyed, or trusted throughout the day. Often such verses stay in the mind for months and even years. They outline the wax design that forms a more Christlike pattern as the events of life engulf one.

From early years I had said I was going to be a missionary to China; but this conviction was greatly reinforced and specifically confirmed one morning at college chapel when the blackboard contained a beautifully printed text: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go"; and in the right-hand corner the countries for special prayer were listed, China, Japan, and Korea.

Again God was saying "go," and for me it would be China. Such a deep conviction of having been chosen was much needed later when the trials of studying the Chinese language could have ruined my spirit. The wax of the knowledge of the leading of God was the one steadying thought when I faced my language problems. It enabled me to accept my own limitations and to trust that God could use me as I was. The wax of God's Word produces the resistance to discouragement.

**A**FTER having been in Tsingtao, China, for only six weeks, I received a letter from the American consul advising all Americans to leave the Communist-threatened area on the next evacuation ship. Following my first impulse, I signed up to leave. Later, when praying, I realized that I was making my own decision without any consideration of God's will. During my Bible study, as well as during prayer, the Lord seemed to say that he had not told me to leave.

Typical of many, many verses that came in my Bible study of those days was Psalm 37:3: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." When the evacuation ship sailed out of the harbor, I had no regret or fear. My heart was full of peace because of the promise of God written in wax on my heart. Part of the beauty of life is not only in obeying the Lord but in having the right feelings toward circumstances.

Later I evacuated to Shanghai, not America. In the year and a half that followed I went through the most

valuable mission experiences I had in China. How much better was God's will and wisdom than my own, and how wonderful that his Word could make me trust him even when I did not know the outcome of following the road he chose.

The batik of life is sometimes marred where there is no wax of truth actively protecting the soul from the onslaughts of life's overwhelming experiences.

It was in the land of batiks, Indonesia, that I experienced one such marring of the joy of Christian living. When student criticism of my seminary teaching came to my attention, I was overwhelmed with a sense of failure and despair. For several weeks I wanted to weep when alone. It must have obviously marked the batik of my life; for my mother, who was visiting at the time, noticed the change in my spirit. I had made a big thing out of a little thing.

Articles about batik say that errors in the waxing and errors in the dying cannot be rectified.

Thank God, in life the Great Artist can take the marred and restore it to beauty and joy.

Everyone, not just the missionaries, has his own batik. The Heavenly Painter wants to write his great truths, his commands, and his promises upon your heart. He knows the color and density of the dyes of circumstances that will sweep over your life in the coming days; and he would like to make you ready. God says, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10b). The Christian replies, "Write, dear Lord, with wax."