



*A Voyage Round the World*  
W.S.W. Ruschenberger (1838)

*William Ruschenberger was a white medical doctor who spent his adult life working for the US navy. In 1835-37, he served aboard a US warship that was on a diplomatic mission to finalize trade agreements with the nations of Oman (on the Arabian peninsula) and Siam (present-day Thailand). Ruschenberger subsequently published an account of the globe-circling voyage and the places he had visited on the way.*

*The excerpt presented here prefaces a complimentary account of American Protestant missionaries whom Ruschenberger saw running schools and a medical clinic in Bangkok (which he spells differently). In this excerpt, Ruschenberger defends missionaries against certain other unidentified Americans overseas who have tried to turn local rulers against the missionaries. Those other Americans were probably merchants who feared that missionaries would create ill will toward Westerners by attacking local religions and customs or that missionaries would try to suppress "vice trades" such as the sale of alcohol and sex. Ruschenberger argues, however, that merchants should support missionaries because the Christianization of Asian societies will create vast new markets for the Western products that are the trappings of Christian civilization.*

Among the most agreeable hours spent at Bangkok were those passed in the society of the American missionaries.

Whatever may be our opinions relative to the soundness of the policy under which they act, we cannot fail to accord to them admiration for their devotedness to the high cause which excites and cheers them in their philanthropic labors. We see them among a race of beings whose degraded state of knowledge and morals, and whose wretchedness and poverty, call hourly for their sympathy and charitable exertions, while the strong passion which swells every breast remains controlled in their bosoms—I mean the affection which binds every individual to his own home and hearthstone. Deprived of friends, of congenial society, of many comforts and all the luxuries of life, we behold them still cheerfully toiling in a cause, the success of which appears to be almost hopeless—at least, the most sanguine now living cannot expect to see it. While they contend against all these chilling circumstances, they are surveyed and watched by the eyes of individuals whose interests are opposed to the diffusion of knowledge and the advancement of virtue and religion. And those persons, often their own countrymen, are found in the ranks of the ignorant political rulers, encouraging them to persist in their ignorance and even to curtail the few privileges the missionaries may have already gained. I am not aware that this is the case in Siam; but in other parts of the world, this is generally true. They misconstrue [the missionaries'] motives and most maliciously distort and misrepresent their acts and words. Those persons certainly have not calmly investigated the subject, or they cannot be aware that they are standing in their own light. They will not believe that the march of the Christian religion will always be followed closely by intelligence and increase of commerce.

However my opinions may be swayed by philanthropic views, without discussing the question of its intrinsic necessity on the score of religion, I would encourage the Christianization of all Asia, Polynesia, and indeed of all the world, because I think it is sound policy. By such a change, commerce must be benefitted. Our merchants, upon a candid investigation of the subject, will

probably find their interest in doing all they can in behalf of those pious individuals who sacrifice the honors of this world in earning a glorious crown in the next by attempting to put misbelievers in the path to sound morals, true religion, and rational liberty.

To what extent our trade in the East would be augmented by the conversion to Christianity of Siam, Cochin-China, China, and Japan, it is impossible to conjecture. When the half-naked millions of Asia shall attain Christianity and, with it, all the new wants which the necessary change in their social condition will produce, the soil of our country, as rich and vast as it is, will be scarcely adequate to supply them. A new and extensive mart must be opened for our manufactures of all kinds, and even the literary will find an increased demand for their labors. Hundreds of ships will spread their sails to the eastward of the Cape of Good Hope, destined for the shores of Asia and the isles scattered in the southern ocean; and commerce will pour her wealth, gathered in the old world, into the lap of the new.

**Source:** W.S.W. Ruschenberger, *A Voyage Round the World* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1838), 310-311, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t93786b32>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. A long sentence broken up for readability. Punctuation emended in line with modern American conventions. Spellings of geographical locations reproduced as in the source publication, but *Cape of Good Hope* capitalized per modern usage (where *cape* was lowercase in the source). Likewise, *Christian* and its derivatives, all lowercase in the source publication, have been capitalized here. The lowercasing of *the southern ocean* and *the old world* and *the new* replicates the source.

These edited excerpts from Ruschenberger's book are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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