

HEROES + HERETICS

Alex Bunn examines pioneering missionaries to China



Alex Bunn is CMF Associate Head of Student Ministries (Field) and a GP in London

HEROES 16: Hudson Taylor and Gladys Aylward

Hudson Taylor
1832-1905

*'nothing too much
for Christ'*

In our last edition, we remembered Thomas Barnardo, who though inspired by Hudson Taylor to become a missionary to China was eventually called to stay in London. Now we consider Hudson himself, whose legacy in China has transformed the ethnic mix of the global church. Soon China will send more missionaries than the West ever sent at its peak!

Hudson's father was a pharmacist in Barnsley, Yorkshire. He devoted his first son to God, reassuring his wife 'you cannot love this child more than God already does'.¹ But Hudson grew up a weakly child, frequently contracting infections. He would take long baths and imagine his knees to be islands populated by Chinese men wearing long robes, and asked his mother if he could grow pigtails like them.

When he was 17, his mother felt a burden to pray for her son when she was away on business. Feeling a deep peace, she wrote in her diary 'I am so sure my prayers have been



answered, even though I am 80 miles away, I can now change that to the past tense'. On return, she learned that Hudson had read a tract stating that 'Christianity did not mean struggling away, year after year, in the hope of being good enough to get to heaven. Jesus simply asked me to fall down on my knees and accept him as saviour, accept his free gift of salvation, and to praise his name forever!'

medical school
economics

Hudson gained valuable medical training in Hull, but the physician he apprenticed with often forgot to pay him.

Hudson wanted to live by faith in God's provision to prepare for China, so did not remind his boss, and risked going hungry. On one occasion, he gave his last coin to a poor family with a sick mother and a newborn baby. He later felt that had he not had the courage to trust at that moment, his whole spiritual life would have been wrecked. He had a bowl of thin porridge that night, which he 'wouldn't have swapped for a prince's feast'. The woman lived, and the next morning a stranger gave him a gift

five times the amount he had given away. He remembered George Mueller's saying that 'the kingdom of God is the "bank that will not break"', and reflected: 'If we are faithful in the little things we shall gain experience and strength that will be helpful to us in the more serious trials of life'.

'if we are faithful in the little things we shall gain experience and strength that will be helpful to us in the more serious trials of life'

He also believed in tithing his whole income, even as a medical student, which he could not afford while renting with his aunt. He therefore risked offending her by moving to cheaper lodgings. He also economised by living on brown biscuits, herring and pickled cabbage – a useful tip for today's medical students!

He moved to the Royal London for further medical training, but caught 'malignant fever' from dissection as a result of an open cut on his finger, before the invention of latex gloves. 'There is nothing to worry about. Unless I am greatly mistaken I have work to do in China and shall not die. But if I do not recover then I will look forward to going to be with my master.' CMF still recommends the use of gloves for exposure-prone procedures!

life jackets and pigtails

When he left for China, he almost died within sight of Wales. The ship was driven within two lengths of rocks near Caernarfon, so Hudson wrote his name in his pocket book to aid identification of his body. His mother had given him a life jacket, but he had already given it away!

Though continuing to suffer dangerous illnesses, Hudson's bout of smallpox had one benefit. He awoke to find Maria Dyer nursing him to health, and despite pock marks, they soon married. However, missionary life had a high mortality; Hudson lost several children and Maria, perhaps to cholera, and had to return home with TB himself. But he made good use of his time, gaining membership of the Royal College of Surgeons, taking midwifery exams, and updating a Chinese New Testament.

He persevered, speaking and distributing 3,000 Bibles and tracts in the provinces, negotiating violent mobs and wary magistrates, not dissimilar to Peter and Paul in Acts. Early on he had decided to remove one barrier that marked him out as a 'foreign devil'. He decided to dye his fair hair and grow a long pigtail. It didn't go well at first, as the ammonia bottle exploded in his face, giving him a chemical burn. But his desire to affirm whatever he could of the local culture as Paul did in Acts 17, drew scorn and mockery from other Westerners, who called it 'unseemly', 'disgraceful', and 'very bad taste'. But it allowed him to mingle and have a far longer lasting impact on China. 'Let us in everything not sinful become like the Chinese, that by all means we may save some'.² His opposition to the opium (heroin) trade, which Britain forced on China, also won him local respect.

'let us in everything not sinful become like the Chinese, that by all means we may save some'

Even the communists, despite their atheism, conceded that this missionary had done immeasurable good for China; they erected

a monument in his honour after his grave was lost. Missionaries had founded 6,000 schools, 19 universities and 900 hospitals.³

The mission agency he founded, the China Inland Mission (CIM), became the first interdenominational agency, and the first to employ unmarried women. CIM baptised 50,000 Chinese in Hudson's lifetime through its 1000 missionaries, and it eventually grew to be the largest Protestant mission organisation in the world. Sadly though, they were not protected during the terrible Boxer Rebellion in 1900, an uprising against Western powers. CIM suffered more than any other mission in China – 58 missionaries and 21 children were killed. But Taylor refused to accept payment for loss of property or life, to show the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ', and said:

'If I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China, but Christ. Can we do enough for such a precious saviour?'

Hudson's impact was so great it led one historian to say that 'no other missionary in the nineteenth centuries since the apostle Paul has had a wider vision and has carried out a more systematised plan of evangelising a broad geographical area than Hudson Taylor'.⁴



Gladys Aylward
1902-1970
*the 'little' woman
with the big heart*

Gladys Aylward hoped to join CIM, but failed their exams. Though not a great start to a career, this 'little woman' was made of sterner stuff and so set out independently. She saved up her maid's wages each week and deposited them with the travel agent. Her mother sewed secret pockets in her coat for her Bible, passport and cash. Like many British travellers today, she packed all the travel essentials she couldn't live without: corned beef, baked beans and tea, even a kettle, and headed off on the Trans-Siberian train. She was forced off near the Manchurian border due to an unreported war. She saw gangs chained together being

dragged off to Siberian labour camps. She reached Vladivostok, and thanks to a transcription error, her passport had been marked 'machinist' not missionary, which gave her some status and protection. But she had to pretend to be a prisoner aboard a Japanese ship to escape.

Eventually she arrived in Yangcheng, rural China, to live with Mrs Lawson, an elderly missionary. She advised her to sleep with her clothes and valuables on. The reason became

apparent in the morning, as there were no curtains, and many locals had filled the windows to spectate!

Together they ran a lodging house for muleteers, and within a year she had conversational Chinese and a growing stock of Bible and folk stories to relate. She would need to be independent as her only Western companion died soon after.

she had never expected to be paid to share the gospel with state sanction, whilst banishing a disabling custom!

how beautiful are the feet...

Her remit expanded when the local mandarin visited her and tasked her to become the foot inspector. Foot binding had become illegal, and Gladys was the only woman in the region with unbound feet, who would be fit to inspect and enforce. The mandarin was happy for her to share the gospel as she went house to house on state business, as he knew that Christians no longer bound their feet. She had never expected to be paid to share the gospel with state sanction, whilst banishing a disabling custom!

When a riot broke out in the local men's prison, she arrived and found the convicts were rampaging in the prison courtyard. Several of them had been killed, with soldiers were afraid to intervene. The warden said to Gladys, 'Go into the yard and stop the rioting'. She said, 'How can I do that?' The warden said, 'You have been preaching that those who trust in Christ have nothing to fear'.

She discerned that the conflicts were due to lack of food and work. She found looms and

grindstones to gain income and grain, and people began to call her 'Ai-weh-deh,' meaning 'Virtuous One.' Later during the war, the traditional policy favoured beheading all prisoners to prevent escape. The Mandarin asked Ai-weh-deh for advice, and a plan was made for relatives and friends of the convicts to post a bond guaranteeing their good behaviour. The Mandarin was so impressed he later came to Christ.

virtuous one

But Gladys is mostly remembered for protecting children. One day she came across a sickly looking child in the sun. She scolded the girl's guardian who replied 'if she dies, I can get another one', and offered to sell her. Exasperated, she gave her all the money she had. 'Ninepence' became the name of the first of many adopted children, with colourfully names such as Precious Bundle, Glorious Ruby and Jade Lily.

On one occasion, she paid for the release of a maid whose master bought and sold girls for market after footbinding. 'My heart was bound up tight with sin, like I bound the feet of the little girls' she said, 'now I am free and my heart can grow big with happiness'.

wanted dead or alive

From 1938, Yangcheng became the middle of a battle zone, and their territory changed hands four times. Word reached Gladys that there were posters offering a large reward for her capture, so she decided to take the 100 orphans under her care on a 27-day journey over mountains to safety in Shensi. Crossing the Yellow River felt as impossible as parting the Red Sea, especially as the Chinese had removed all boats that might aid the Japanese. The

children recalled how they crossed:

'We prayed for the river to be opened so that we could walk across like the children of Israel, but God knew we were tired of walking, so he sent a boat, and that was far better.'

When they got to Tungkwang they faced a different problem. The Japanese would shoot at the trains if they thought there were Chinese aboard. Keeping toddlers quiet in a warzone was no easy task. Gladys loaded the babies between large lumps of coal at dawn, and miraculously, not a shot was fired, until they awoke laughing, covered in coal dust. She may have failed her missionary exams, but she brought 100% of her orphans to safety, which was a greater achievement.

Arriving in Sian, she immediately set out to preach and collapsed in a nearby village. She was picked up and returned by cow cart, still singing hymns, deliriously preaching on the prodigal son as she was admitted to hospital for a month, for relapsing fever, typhus and pneumonia, exhausted and malnourished, and barely conscious. But who was she? One of the orphans showed the staff a book she owned. An inscription in the cover read 'to Gladys from Aunt Bessie'. Was she not Chinese as they imagined?

Eventually she was convicted to return home to the UK, after a Chinese student showed her an English newspaper:

'The England that sent you with the gospel must be worshipping other gods'

'How do you know?'

'Your papers are full of sportsmen, film stars, and gossip, there is no mention of Jesus. What happened?'

It is a question that we might still ask today. ■

Reflections

Inspiration from the life of Hudson Taylor:

- undeterred by poor health
- was generous financially even as a student
- became a Chinaman to win many Chinamen
- valued the faithful in other denominations and unmarried women

Inspiration from the life of Gladys Aylward:

- undeterred by academic failure
- courageous advocate of prisoners and orphans

Further reading

- Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret* is currently available as a free e-book at: bit.ly/1LhBBNg
- *Gladys Aylward: the Little Woman*, (Moody Paperback, 1974) is a classic, very readable and short.
- *The Cross: Jesus in China*. A superb documentary about the gospel's impact on China: bit.ly/1JorWXI
- David Aikman. *Jesus in Beijing, how Christianity is transforming China and changing the global balance of power* (Monarch, 2006)

REFERENCES

1. This and other personal recollections from the family's diaries and letters quoted in Mackenzie C. *Hudson Taylor: An adventure begins*. Christian Focus Publications, 1999
2. See 1 Corinthians 9:22
3. *The Cross: Jesus in China* (video): bit.ly/1JorWXI
4. Tucker R. *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A biographical history of Christian missions*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1983:73