

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

November/December 1997

ISSN 8756-1336

An Unusual Christmas Celebration

The work of Amy Carmichael in south India, known as the Dohnavur Fellowship, is still very much alive. Sometimes foreigners help for a limited time, but an Indian woman, Nesaruthina Carunia, is the director. All her regular staff are Indian. In the beautiful compound there is a hospital where at Christmastime a feast is given for the lepers—a feast very different from American celebrations, yet one which surely means infinitely more to those sufferers than our elaborate and expensive ones. As I read Balaleela's account in the prayer letter, *Dust of Gold*, I thought what a prodigious undertaking it is, yet how full of deep joy both for the guests and for those who work so hard to prepare everything. Ponder the relative simplicity of the occasion, in contrast to our frantic Christmas spending and our so often harried and hectic attempts to "have fun." Here is the story:

"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there anything too hard for Me?" (Jeremiah 32:27).

"Always pray and never lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

"These were challenging verses to me when I was praying about the Leprosy Feast. Very few patients had been coming to collect medicines recently as the special drug we were giving had been stopped in accordance with Government ruling. It was the rainy season and this could have prevented many from coming to the Feast, but God had everything in hand.

"Cooks were engaged, foodstuffs and vegetables, etc. were bought, cooking vessels hired. Firewood was stacked ready and extra electric lights installed. Banana leaves, for use as plates, were washed and placed in neat piles; spoons and coconut-shell ladles counted. Hospital staff enjoyed collecting the yellow tecoma flowers to make into garlands and the whole place was decorated with colored stars, etc.

"The night of cooking started with prayer, then the employees washed and chopped and cooked. The team was cheered by visits from our Accals and Annachies

[the women and men who work at Dohnavur, which includes those who care for the more than four hundred children who live there]. The Lord controlled the weather, so that they were able to do most of the cooking in the outer courtyard. However, early in the morning heavy rain began, and a place had to be found for the frying under cover of the roof. When it was all finished the garlands were hung, and the outpatient waiting-halls looked beautiful. The patients started to arrive and before 9:00 A.M. there were more than 150 people. We held the meeting inside the hall instead of in the open air and the people listened attentively. The speaker had a profound message for the patients as well as for those helping them. After the meeting, the guests found a place to sit with their leaves in front of them. Heaps of rice and curry were served and they happily started to fill up their vessels also, to take home for other family members! Although it is the custom in India to eat with the fingers, some guests needed spoons because their fingers were too deformed or missing altogether.

"Each guest was given a Christmas card with a Tamil Bible text added, a banana, and the children also had a flower posy to decorate their hair. They all seemed very happy.

"After the Feast, those who needed medicines collected them and set off for home. As soon as they had left it started to pour with rain, which made their journey difficult but made our job of cleaning up much easier. The remaining food was distributed among the employees who had worked all night and those who had helped clear up afterwards.

"The Lord helped us to pray and not lose heart, and our reward was to see so many patients come. Praise and glory to God for Whom nothing is too hard."

(Footnote from Elisabeth: Those who wish to receive that most unusual of all missionary letters, *Dust of Gold*, in order to join in prayer for the Dohnavur Fellowship, may write to Mrs. J.R. Sessions, 3737 West Lake Dr., Augusta, GA 30907. Her telephone: [706]860-6470.)

This Single Truth

And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissueed fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,
No love that in the family dwells,
No carolling in the frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single truth compare—
That God was Man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

John Betjeman

Travels

Beijing: a little yearly retreat with American women who work in China. Spoke to various groups, once in the university, once in a very tiny, cramped apartment for a few students who courageously have come to Christ—a charming, happy crew, their lives so recently transformed. Lars watched a huge slaughtered animal being de-furred outside a restaurant which advertised *dog* as its specialty. He decided against eating there.

We had never been to China before. Its vastness, its teeming millions, its industry overwhelmed me. So it exists? There really is a place called China? I thought of the hymn sung to the tune of Londonderry Air, "I cannot tell how He will win the nations, how He will claim His earthly heritage, how satisfy the needs and aspirations of East and West, of sinner and of sage. But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory, and He shall reap the harvest He has sown, and some glad day His sun will shine in splendor when He the Savior, Savior of the world, is known."

Mongolia: a thirty-hour train trip out of Beijing, past the Great Wall which climbs needle-sharp peaks; past where coolies were working on a superhighway using hand tools, cutting stone, carting dirt in wheelbarrows, digging tunnels; past little villages, mud-brick houses and outdoor ovens, nuclear plants and coal heaps, green grass country like the high Andes, horses drinking from a stream, shepherds with flocks, rice paddies with squatting figures at work. At 9:00 P.M. the train is emptied at the border of Mongolia. The wheels must be changed to a narrower gauge. We fill out papers,

passports are examined again and again, five hours later we board and go to bed. A knock on the door demands papers and passports—*again*. We are searched and questioned, an exercise in futility, as no one speaks English! To bed again, another knock, two officials scratch heads over what to do with us, finally give up. By 8:45 A.M., we've seen horses, cows, goats, dogs, camels, and one small deer or antelope. We are crossing the vast Gobi Desert, familiar to me because as a child I had read of Mildred Cable and Francesca French, those two dauntless missionaries who crossed it, but not by train. We stop in a town where little boys beg for handouts. We toss out cookies and pens. They pounce on them and tear away. Later we are excited to see a herd of dromedaries close to the railroad. We are met at the Ulaan Bataar station by Martha Taylor, six feet two, gracious and lovely Southern Baptist, and her driver to whom she spoke the most impossibly difficult-sounding language I've ever heard. Supper with a Christian Mongolian family: meat turnovers, cabbage and carrot salad. I spoke to earnest young people in a Bible school. They prayed simultaneously with great fervor and listened intently. A beautiful drive out of the city into great rolling hills, green grass, weird rock formations. A visit to a *ger* (*yurt* in Russian)—a round house like a cake, built with wooden slats covered with skins, then with felt (which Mongolians invented, they said), then with white canvas. All are alike, about twenty feet in diameter with a stove in the center, a hole in the roof. They were friends of Martha, and although they were not expecting us, they immediately set about fixing food: very weak tea with hot milk and *salt*, yogurt, boiled lamb, and strange hard slabs of butter that doesn't melt. Mongolians as a rule eat nothing but meat and milk. "Animals eat vegetables," they explain, "We eat the animals." There were brightly painted wooden beds and cupboards, a very adequate and simple life—and in such magnificent surroundings. Back to the city, tea with a group of sweet Christian Mongol girls, other meetings including a weekend retreat for expatriates, then a flight back to Beijing. Supper in a restaurant

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where no one spoke English. Huge hilarity. We managed to get chicken with peanuts and boiled fish by using appropriate gestures which had the whole staff in stitches. Flying home on June 10 I woke to a breathtaking wrinkled no-man's land (Siberia?)—brown earth spotted with frozen puddles, snow-covered mountains stretching to the far horizon, and black rivers snaking through all. Not a sign of humanity.

And of the missionary convention in Taichung and the hastily arranged speaking engagements in Hong Kong in July I must say nothing but thank you to all who pray for us. I was aware of a keen experience of my utter dependence on the Lord, a "being sheltered" by Him, and remembered a hymn my mother loved to sing, "All the way my Savior leads me, what have I to ask beside?"

Family Reunion

Those of you who have read *The Shaping of a Christian Family* know about our beloved Gale Cottage in Franconia, New Hampshire. In June, the six of us Howards with our spouses had a happy reunion there. It is not easy for us to get together—Phil, the "patriarch" of the family at seventy-three, lives in Edmonton, Alberta; Dave in Miami; Ginny, Tom, and I in Massachusetts; and Jim, the youngest, in White Sulphur Springs, Montana. We did a lot of laughing, singing hymns to the accompaniment of an ancient little melodeon or a modern keyboard, going over all the family quotes, and talking about our wonderful parents, whom we appreciate far more than we knew how to when we were children. We did some mountain climbing and some praying. One evening Tom and Jim sat on the sofa by the huge fireplace, reading Beatrix Potter's *Two Bad Mice*. Ginny leafed through a bird book, Lars dozed, two in-laws, Joyce and Lovelace, read and wrote letters, and I thought about our priceless heritage.

Prayer

"Lord, I do not know what to ask. You alone know what I need. You love me better than I know how to love myself. O Father! Give to your child what she herself is too ignorant to pray for. I dare not ask either for crosses or consolations. I simply present myself before You. I open my heart to You. I adore Your purposes even though I don't know them. I am silent. I offer

myself in sacrifice, I yield myself to You. I want to have no other desire than to accomplish Your will. Teach me to pray. Pray You Yourself in me. Amen."

Fénelon (modern English translation by E.E.)

Bad Times Back in B.C.

"Children today are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food, and tyrannize their teachers" (Socrates, 470-399 B.C.). Nothing changes without discipline. "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death" (Proverbs 23:13).

The Most Terrifying Verse

A radio listener named David Landon writes, "I have long maintained and frequently said that the most terrifying verse in the New Testament, for a Christian husband, is Ephesians 5:23. Wifey doesn't have to love her hubby—she just has to submit to him and be in subjection. He can be the second worst monster in the world, but if she is in subjection, she is in the will of God. Friend husband, however, must love his wife—in the sense of *agape*—and *as Christ loved the church*, if you please—as much as and in the same manner as Christ loved the church. There is room for a whole series of sermons on that topic if we could only find a sufficiently astute preacher. We are not told to love only loveable women, but the woman we are married to—and there are no limits on her disposition. She may be an angel from heaven, or second cousin to Jezebel. We are to love her with an *agape* love, a disinterested desire for her highest good, regardless of how she feels toward us. Thank goodness I don't have to *like* her. That is the only thing that keeps me from banging my head against the wall. If I had to do that, I would just give up completely. Fortunately, I am married to an angel who somehow got lost on her way home. When I proposed to Opal, I was forty-two and she was forty-seven. I told her, 'Look, ol' gal, I'm a crotchety old bachelor and you're a fussy old maid. There is no way in the world that we are going to get along perfectly. The only thing I have to offer is that we'll have fewer problems as man and wife than as spinster and bachelor.' She said yes, and we had the problems, as prophesied, but after thirty-two years, we wouldn't trade it for anything."

The Story of Daily Light

One of the ways which helped our family memorize Scripture was the reading of *Daily Light*, a little book of Scripture only, without comment, one page for each morning, one for each evening of the year. My father read the evening portion to us at suppertime. Throughout my life and the lives of my parents and hundreds of others I've known, this book has been our companion, astonishingly suited to the needs of the day, as though the very subjects were arranged by God Himself for each particular reader. And very likely they were.

Many years ago my great-uncle Charlie (Charles G. Trumbull) wrote to the publishers (Samuel Bagster and Sons, Ltd., London) for the story of how *Daily Light* came into being. Robert Bagster replied:

"This book was prepared entirely within our family, mostly by my father, Jonathan Bagster, his sister, and eldest daughter, while others of the younger ones (myself included), worked in a subordinate position. Few are able to appreciate the heart-searching care with which every text was selected, the days, nay weeks, of change, alterations, and improvements, until at last each page was passed.

"It has been said that each page was prayed over. This is true enough but far less than the fact that the portions were left for weeks to see if any further guidance came."

My uncle comments, "It has often struck me as a wonderful thought that hundreds of thousands of Christians throughout the world, to its remotest corners, are each day reading the same page with its message of comfort and help."

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

I encourage you who wish to spend a quiet minute or two each day with a single theme straight from the Word of God to buy yourselves this little treasury. It is available from Zondervan in both King James and New International versions.

Travel Schedule November 1997–February 1998

November 1 Gaithersburg, Md., Covenant Life Church, Carolyn Mahaney, (301)869-2800.

November 2 Edgewood, Md., Assembly of God, Rev. Thomas Twigg, 809 Edgewood Rd., 21040; (410)676-4455.

November 17-21 Willingen, Germany, Dept. of the Army, Protestant Women of the Chapel, Maj. Harry E. Colter, chaplain, 49-6221-577119.

December 6-8 Gillette, N.J., Renewal Resources, Clara Bickel, (908)647-8371.

December 13 Ipswich, Mass., First Presbyterian women's Christmas tea, Jacki DeBlois, (508)356-7690.

January 12, 13 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*

January 17 S. Hamilton, Mass., Gordon-Conwell Seminary, David Horne, (508)468-7111.

January 20 Leesburg, Fla., First Baptist women's dinner, (352)787-1005.

January 31 Boston, EANE Congress, Andrew S. Accardy, (617)229-1903.

February 14 Louisville, Ky., Southeast Christian Church, Lynn Reece, (502)451-0047.

February 20 Houston, Tex., New Life Christian Center, Sharon Cave, (713)947-1678.

February 21 College Station, Tex., women's conference, Marsha Ross, (409) 694-9335.

February 28 Murfreesboro, Tenn., Trinity Presbyterian Church, (615)895-2018.

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