



ACCORDING to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. (Phil 1:20)

The annals of the China Inland Mission are filled with glorious accounts of courageous men and women who gave their all for Christ. Organized in 1865 by Hudson Taylor, the legacy of the missionary impact of this organization is emblazoned on the hearts of millions of Chinese Christian today who huddled silently to worship in small groups and 'house churches.' Missionary histories in China recount many who sacrificed a life of pleasure for the hard life and deprecations of China in the last and preceding centuries. Lottie Moon was a famous missionary, too, of the China Inland Mission.

In contrast to today's denominational fundraising programs of each church, it was common for the American churches of the past to pool resources across denominational lines to provide support for overseas missions. The China Inland Mission was such an organization.

There is a small, neglected Christian cemetery overlooking the rice-bowl center of Wuhu in the south of China. In the cemetery are the graves of two very courageous and dedicated Christian missionaries – John and Betty Stam – both martyrs to Christ and victims of a heartless Communist beheading.

Betty Stam, at the early age of 18, already had heard the Voice of the Angel of China calling her forth with her future husband, John. She wrote at that age:

*Lord, I give up all my plans and purposes
All my own desires and hopes
And accept Thy will for my life.
I give myself, my life, my all
Utterly to Thee to be Thine forever.
Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit
Use me as Thou wilt, send me where Thou wilt
And work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost now and forever.*

Betty preceded her future husband, John, in traveling to China in 1931. John sailed a year later and the two were married in China in 1933, having previously met at Moody Bible Institute, where their little daughter, Helen Priscilla, was born a year later in September in the Methodist Hospital at Wuhu.

There was little prior warning of insurgent activity near the Stams' missionary station at Tsingteh – only rumors of such activity. The day dawned as any other. John prepared to study for his biblical teaching program, and Betty bathed their beautiful baby girl, Helen. It would be the last time she bathed Helen. Betty wondered aloud to John if he thought they should leave.

Communist insurgents surprised the local authorities by overpowering the guards and entering in at the East Gate of the city. John and Betty were surprised to find their door broken down as the rebels made a rude entry. The place was a rented storefront which served as a residence as well as a chapel. Though John served the intruders tea, they were in no mood for fellowship. They ordered the two to prepare to leave. When the baby cried, the varmints threatened to kill the child. Amazingly, the baby remained silent for the next 27 hours.

The two (and baby) were herded into the streets dressed only in their undergarments and rushed away to Miaoshou some twelve miles away. John's hands were tied behind his back with enough force to leave heavy bruises. The couple were thrust into a hut of mud that night and it seems that the bindings on John's arms were removed for he wrote that night: *"My wife, baby and myself are today in the hands of communist bandits. Whether we will be released or not no one knows. May God be magnified in our bodies, whether by life or by death. Philippians 1:20"* In the same night, Betty stuffed notes, provisions, and a ten-dollar bill in the Helen's blanket – an act that probably would save the baby's life.

As a crisp winter December dawned on the village at Wuhu, Betty and John Stam were led outside the gates of the city to nearby hill, and beheaded – John first, and then Betty. (8 December 1934). How similar the details of their death to that of our Lord who was also crucified on a lonely hill outside the gate of the city.

A Chinese Christian layman had followed as closely as it was safe to do. Apparently, the culprits who beheaded the missionaries must have forgotten the baby who lay sleeping (27 hours without a cry) in the hut. The Chinese layman, Mr. Lo, found the baby along with some Lactogen and a ten dollar bill to help smuggle the child to safety - the last act of a loving mother. Mr. Lo's wife was the only woman available who knew how to mix the formula (another sign of God's Providence). The baby was smuggled into the mission at Wuhu by means of a vegetable cart and was thereby saved.

Mr. Lo found the bodies and had caskets made for them. He even attempted to sew the severed heads back on their bodies. The coffins lay for forty days in the high weeds on the hill overlooking Miaoshou until, finally, government authorities were able to recover them. The bodies were respectfully wrapped in white linen fabric and the coffins had been filled with lye for preservation. The couple were buried on a green hillside overlooking Wuhu where, on some grand Easter morning of God's choosing, they shall arise along with all other Christian converts buried in China to go to be with the Lord.

The baby, Helen Priscilla Stam, was returned to the United States and was adopted by Betty's sister and her husband who were missionaries to the Philippines where the baby was raised.

At the funeral, many Chinese Christians were heard to ask, "Why these good people and not us?" That is a mystery reserved for Heaven alone. The deaths of these two missionaries sent shock-waves around the globe. The editorial manager of the China Inland Mission in England, Frank Houghton, was present in China at the time of the martyrdom. As Houghton was travelling over the Szechuan Mountains, he was reminded of the verse from 2 Corinthians 8:9 – *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.* (2 Cor 8:9)

Houghton wrote a beautiful hymn to commemorate the Christ-like death of these valiant Christian missionaries:

Thou Who Wast Rich

*Thou who was rich beyond all splendor,
All for love's sake becamest poor;
Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
Sapphire paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who was rich beyond all splendor,
All for love's sake becamest poor.*

*Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest Man;
Stooping so low, but sinners raising
Heavenward by Thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest Man.*

*Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Savior and King, we worship Thee.
Emmanuel, within us dwelling
Make us what Thou wouldst have us be.
Thou who art love beyond all telling
Savior and King, we worship Thee.*

Amen