

The Adventure Begins

There is a saying that ‘mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun’. The sweltering heat of the Chinese sun sent most foreigners scurrying for the shade and a cool bath, but not all.

‘Foreign Devil! Foreign Devil!’ The shouts echoed down the busy Chinese street, where crowds of people spilled out from tall houses and broken down huts. Scruffy children ran from their play to see the commotion. Some stared unabashed at the strange foreigner making his way down the road. Others were frightened and hid behind the skirts of older sisters or mothers.

Ornate Chinese temples and strong stalwart city walls belied the extreme poverty of the majority of these Shanghai residents. Poverty was a daily reality for many.

‘Foreign Devil!’ the cry got louder. ‘Here he comes, with his silly yellow hair and skin the colour of goats milk. Look at his eyes as bright as a flower. It’s strange to see so many colours on one person.’ Old grandmothers and young women took great delight in discussing every inch of the peculiar foreigner. ‘Look at the silly buttons on his front and his back. Why does he have buttons on the front of his clothes and then buttons on the back as well?’

Chinese people wore simple loose fitting clothes, but the foreigners wore fussy, complicated clothes which made no sense. Chinese men wore their hair in pigtails down the back of their heads. The rest of the head was then shorn. This foreigner had hair like straw all over his head.

Young men followed the yellow-haired foreigner a few strides behind. They carried large baskets on long bamboo poles. These baskets held a variety of different products ready for selling at one of the many Shanghai markets. One man held one end of the pole and another held the opposite end with the large heavy basket swaying in between. They sniggered at the strange man, until he felt embarrassed and awkward. He looked at his clothes and at the other people round about. He too could see that everybody was staring at him. In his hand he carried a large book and a few pages of notes. 'He is heading towards the town meeting place' said one grandmother. 'He must have important news to tell.'

Scrawny old chickens were kicked out of the way and babies were slung onto backs as the locals followed the pale-faced foreigner.

Women walked awkwardly on tiny bound feet. This was because little girls, all over China, were taken aside by their parents at quite an early age to have their feet bound in tight bandages. This stopped their feet from growing and meant that when they were older they would have tiny, dainty feet which the Chinese loved. No woman, with great big feet, could expect to

get a husband. Men didn't like big feet. Big feet were considered unattractive. As well as that, if you had a wife with small feet, it meant that she couldn't run very far or very fast without getting caught.

More voices joined in the babble of sound.

'Here he comes, here he comes – the "Foreign Devil" in his funny clothes!' Men, women, children, dogs and one or two braying donkeys added to the chaos. The young stranger coughed awkwardly, he was still conscious of all the amusement his clothing was causing. The young men and women, the farmers and merchants, the young children and babies all stared at him. A drop of sweat dripped from the end of his nose. With a white handkerchief he wiped the sweat away and caused more amusement.

'Ha ha! Look at him, he wipes his face with a big white flag. It is even whiter than his face!' He coughed again and prayed earnestly that these people would not waste time laughing at him, but would listen to what God was saying.

When he began to speak, the crowd were surprised. The slim pink lips spoke good Chinese.

'I want to tell you about the one true God. He is the one who made heaven and earth and who has made you! My name is Hudson Taylor and I have travelled a very long way, to come and tell you that the one true God loves you and wants you to love him. I tell you the truth.'

A Chinese merchant stood at the edge of the crowd, curious about all the goings on. 'He says that he will

tell the truth? I have heard of these foreign barbarians. They come from far beyond the middle kingdom where the uncivilised people live. They are uneducated and have no manners. I wonder why all these people listen to him?’ The young Chinese merchant laid down the cotton he had taken to sell at the market that day and listened to what this barbarian had to say.

The barbarian now raised his voice to make himself heard above the noise of the crowd.

‘The God who created the heavens, and the earth, who created the great Yangtze River that flows by us, does not want us to live without hope. He wants to forgive us our sins. He wants us to come back to him and to live our lives with him. But God must punish sin! So he sent his Son, Jesus Christ to live on this earth. Jesus didn’t sin. He was perfect. He came to earth as a little child. He healed the sick, made the lame walk and raised the dead to life. He lived a perfect life instead of us, then he died instead of us. Our wickedness deserves God’s anger and because of our sin we deserve to die. But Jesus Christ died so that we might live and three days later he came back to life! Death did not defeat him.’

Gasps of astonishment and disbelief went up from all corners. The Chinese merchant stood, thoughtfully, his hand on his chin. There was truth here. He could feel it. No other religion had touched his heart in the way that this Jesus did. The merchant had tried many religions, including Buddhism. This Jesus Christ was different. He was truth.

The foreigner shouted out above the babble, 'If you believe and trust in Christ, you will live for ever with him. But if you don't believe in Christ, when you die you will face eternal punishment.'

The crowd 'oohed' and 'aahed' at this amazing speech. Some laughed at the 'silly foreigner' and his 'silly story'.

The Chinese merchant picked up the cotton and left without saying a word. But as he walked, he spoke for the first time with the one who had laid down his life for him on a cross.

The young missionary, Hudson Taylor, sighed as he watched the man disappear round the corner.

The merchant turned for one last look at the heavy black suit, and the sandy-coloured hair and wondered, 'Who is this Hudson Taylor and why does he come to this town?'