

## **JUDSON OF BURMA**

[Harry Foster]

TO the East of India and next door to China there lies the large country of Burma. Missionary work is no longer possible there, but there are many Christians, and it is now 150 years since the Gospel was first taken to that land. The man most responsible was Adoniram Judson. He suffered untold hardships, but he never gave up, because he himself had had such a wonderful experience of the love of Christ changing his whole life.

Adoniram Judson was a student at Providence College, and he was the son of a Christian minister. I am sorry to say that as he began to grow up he turned away from his father's faith, and by the time he became a student he was sure that the clever thing to do was to say that there is no God and to realize that it is silly to talk about a future life after this one.

So, like many students of today, he began to call himself an atheist, and he joined a set at his college who took delight in scoffing at any kind of faith. One of the leaders of this set was a gifted and popular young man whom we will call Edwards. Judson became a close companion of his, and was so charmed with his wit that he loved to have his approval. They took pleasure together in making fun of any kind of Christianity. Judson's father was greatly saddened by this, but his son would not listen to what he had to say, so that in the end all he could do was to pray that Adoniram might be saved from his bad companions and his mocking of God.

It so happened that during a vacation Judson started out on a tour by horseback, and one night he stopped at a wayside inn to ask if he could put up there for the night. The landlord explained that the only room he had to offer was next to one where a young man lay very ill, perhaps dying. Judson replied that this did not matter at all, since he was not afraid of death. 'When you are freed from all those silly religious ideas,' he added, 'you know that Heaven and Hell do not exist and that dying is just like going off to sleep.'

Off he went to bed, but he found that the partition between the two rooms was very thin and in the stillness of the night he could hear the man who was so ill. In fact, he could not help hearing him, for as he lay awake he heard groans and cries of despair from his unfortunate neighbour. The man was clearly afraid to die, and although he cried to God, it was only in dark despair and not with any kind of hope. Judson was greatly moved, but he tried to laugh it off; ashamed of what his college companions would say if they knew of his weakness. Above all, he wondered what his gay friend Edwards would say if he knew that his young companion, who had often laughed at death with him, was now soft and weak about it.

The groans grew worse, and Judson wildly wondered whether he ought to pray to God for help for this unhappy sufferer, but then he realized that he would never again be able to look Edwards in the face if he did so. It was a dreadful night, and he shuddered to hear the evident distress of the dying man.

Then all was still, and he lay sleepless and in fear until the morning. When he got up he found the innkeeper and asked about his neighbour. 'He's dead,' was the blunt reply the man gave him. 'Dead!' exclaimed Judson, 'and who was he?' 'Oh,' explained the innkeeper carelessly, 'he was a student from Providence College; a very fine fellow by the name of Edwards.'

Judson was stunned to find that this was the very man whom he had not wished to offend; the one who had been so funny when he was pouring scorn on those who were worried about death and eternity. He remembered the cries and the groans, and realized how easy it is to mock and say foolish things when all seems well, but how hard it is to face up to the real fact of death and judgment.

Instead of going on with his tour he turned the horse's head back towards his old home, and with a heavy heart he told his father of the shock he had had. He begged his godly father to help him to find a faith which could stand the test of death and eternity, and the father had the joy of telling his boy how God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that those who believe on Him will not be lost but enjoy eternal life. Of course, Adoniram had heard this often before, but he had never been willing to open his mind and heart to the truth and to God's great love. He had

thought that it was smart to scoff, but now he knew how foolish he had been.

It took much persuading and praying before he could credit the fact that Christ still loved him, and that in spite of all he could still find life through believing. At last the assurance came and his heart became so filled with the love of the Lord Jesus that nothing would satisfy him but to take the [9/10] same message of life to those who had never heard it.

Ten years after that night of awakening he was out in Burma, trying to help the Karen people to know the same Saviour. He suffered greatly for his faith. After a period of nearly two years in a dark and dirty prison he was sentenced to death. The exact date and time of his execution were proclaimed, and once more he had to face the grim reality of death. This time, however, it was quite different, for the love of Christ had taken away all fear.

I am glad to say that he escaped, and was able to go on with his witness for Christ in Burma. Many were won for Christ among the Karens. "Think much on the love of Christ", Judson used to say to all the enquirers and converts. In fact, his favourite text was "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18). I wonder what your favourite text is! - H. F.

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