

Christ is Victor

May – June 1997

‘Home Again’

Hudson Taylor’s boyhood memories and conversion

The horse-drawn omnibus rattled over the cobbles, and stopped in Market Square, Barnsley. The passengers emerged one by one, and eventually Hudson appeared, tired and travel-stained after the long journey from London. How friendly and familiar everything appeared—how good it was to be welcomed back home by his strict yet genial father, be-whiskered and coat-tailed, and by the gentle mother with her smoothly brushed hair and dainty muslin cap tied under the chin. And how pleasant, as he walked out, stick in hand, for a stroll, to be greeted warmly by this friend and that, glad to see him again, and eager to hear of his life in the far-away capital. It was all so different from London, where he was just an unimportant stranger, and walked along the busy streets with never a greeting from anyone to cheer him. Weak as he still was from his illness, home was the place above all that gave him complete rest and satisfaction. He sat contentedly by the fire in the warm sitting-room behind the shop, glad of the old familiar setting that brought back so many happy memories. What scenes were revived by the sight of the large, sturdy table in the middle of the room, for instance. Once more he was a very small boy, dressed in his best velvet suit, sitting at the table surrounded by visiting grown-ups. He was watching his mother cutting a delicious looking apple pie into generous portions, which were handed along to her guests—indeed, to everyone but her own small son, who sat politely silent, as he had been trained, waiting in vain for

the plate that was intended for him! At last he realized that somehow his mother had overlooked him this time—and he had been told that on no account must he ask for anything at the table! The story of his ingenuity had been told, time and time again in the family, how, during a lull in the conversation, a little voice had enquired:

“Mamma—do you think apple pie is good for little boys?”

It was at the table, too, that he had sat, day after day, learning the lessons his father set for him, until eventually at the age of eleven, he went to school. Much happier he had been under his father’s tuition than at school, too, though he was one of the star pupils there. There was something eminently wholesome and manly about this father of his, with his rigid ideas of right and wrong, and his unyielding discipline. Hudson had learned to be punctual long before he had his life ruled by clanging school bells! Woe betide the one who was not ready to sit at table, hands washed and hair brushed, when it was time for a meal!

“If there are five people, and they are all kept waiting one minute, then five minutes are lost,” father would say sternly, adding slowly, “Minutes that can never be found again!” It was very solemn indeed!

“Learn to dress quickly,” as another of his axioms. A very good reason he had for it too! “For you have to do it once at least every day of your life.” So, obviously one

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***Weak as he still was
from his illness,
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Renew Your Strength

“Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads.” (Jer 14:3)

They came to the pits and found no water. Human nature is such that when it seeks after God there is so much self-reliance and reluctance to be led through the counsel of God. When man seeks the living God, he must know He is a God who will correct and rebuke and direct him.

People have made their own gods and worship them as they please. Their festivals are times of sin. Thus they

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might as well get used to it! If Hudson smiled at these memories as he sat in the cosy home, it was with the affectionate amusement with which children think about the peculiarities of their parents. And it was interesting to remember that it was from his father he had first heard of China when, as a little five-year-old, he had heard him exclaim vehemently:

"Why don't we send missionaries there! That is the country to aim at, with its teeming population...strong, intelligent, scholarly people!"

And now, nearly fifteen years later, Hudson himself was preparing to go there! As he spent those weeks at home, with plenty of time to think, he marvelled at the way his destiny had been revealed to him. For surely this was his destiny, the particular work that was appointed for him to do? "Go for Me to China." He could never forget the night when he received that Divine commission. Only one other experience, perhaps, stood out more vividly in his memory. China had not come into it, that afternoon in the old warehouse when his whole outlook on life had been completely changed, but had it not been for what took place then, certainly he would have no thought of going to China now. Many a time Hudson lived through that momentous afternoon again. It was over three years ago, yet as clear in his mind as if it had happened yesterday....

He was sixteen years old, and already disappointed with life! How dull it

seemed, living here at home, and helping his father in the shop! It was not that he did not love his parents, for he did, but he found their way of life boring. Balls and hunting parties found no place in their programme. They preferred singing hymns in the little chapel down the road, and Hudson, dutifully accompanying

them, thought it very dull indeed. He tried his best to enjoy it all as they did, but he could not. His own private desire was to live in a large house with a lot of servants, emerging splendidly

in a scarlet jacket, to go hunting. He longed to be able to rush along at the greatest possible speed—on a horse, of course, motor cycles not yet having been invented! These day-dreams, however, could never come true, and it was in a discontented mood that he wandered into the sitting-room one afternoon in June, looking for something to do.

He glanced through the bookcase, but saw nothing there that appealed to him, so turned his attention to a basket of small, paper-covered books, and picked out one of them.

"I know what this will be," he thought. He knew the sort of paper-covered booklets his father was fond of collecting! "It will have an interesting story to begin with, and a moral or a sermon at the end." Well, he decided, he would read the interesting story, and leave the rest! So he took it off to the warehouse across the back yard, where he would be undisturbed by younger sisters with ideas for games and sat down amongst the boxes and bottles to read it.

That was what he needed — a change of mind about God.

He little knew that at that very moment his mother, on holiday about seventy miles away, was kneeling beside her bed, praying for him with unusual earnestness and intensity. Nor had he any idea that six weeks previously his thirteen-year-old sister Amelia had determined that she would pray for him three times a day until his mind was changed about God. That was what he needed—a change of mind about God. He had told her that he was not really at all sure about God; and very moody he seemed as a result! He wasn't

Say What?

*He that dwelleth
in the secret
place of the most
High shall abide
under the
shadow of the
Almighty.
Psalm 91:1*

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even sure there was a God! Amelia, being herself quite sure about God, felt this state of affairs must not be allowed to continue. Realizing, however, that her arguments, convincing and conclusive as they appeared to her, did not seem so to him, she came to the conclusion that only God could change Hudson's mind. That is why she determined to pray three times every day, until it happened. She even made a note of her decision in her diary. For all her corkscrew curls and frilly frocks, Amelia was a young person of some determination, and pray three times a day about the matter she did!

Unaware of all this, Hudson sat in the warehouse and read the booklet. It was the reading of that little booklet that completely changed his outlook on life. Quite suddenly and unexpectedly it dawned upon him that what he had heard about God and Jesus Christ from his earliest childhood, was true. God was real. Jesus Christ was His Son, and had died for the sake of sinners. He had come to life again, and was in Heaven alive, able to see everything on earth—able to see him, right there in the warehouse! He had died for the sins of the whole world—therefore He had died for the sins of Hudson Taylor. He had promised eternal life to all who believed on Him—therefore He had promised eternal life to Hudson Taylor. He heard prayer, therefore He would hear Hudson Taylor's! What a remarkable thing that, having heard it so many times before, it had only just dawned on him! Somehow, it made Hudson feel as he felt when he suddenly saw the simple solution to a mathematical problem that had puzzled him for hours—relieved, enlightened, exuberant. Everything was different now. The heavy feeling of discontent, the uneasy sensation of having done something wrong that would one day be found out, were gone. He felt free. It seemed too good to last!

But it did last. Three and a half years later, sitting contentedly by the glowing, crackling fire, Hudson knew that it lasted. The years since that June afternoon had not been idle, easy ones—indeed, they had contained certain trials and hardships that were completely new to him. But there had always been the exhilarating consciousness of adventure in an unseen realm. The stimulation of finding out that God answered his prayers, that God would lead him into unexplored pathways he would never have discovered himself, was far greater than that of galloping af-

ter the hounds in the limited world of Barnsley and district! And he knew the simple secret of getting rid of that sensation of guilt. He merely did what he knew to be right, and when he inadvertently did that which was wrong, he confessed it to God, who has promised to forgive when sin is acknowledged! Yes, it lasted!

The weeks at Barnsley sped past all too quickly, and renewed in health and spirits, Hudson faced London again. But it was quite a wrench to say goodbye to home again, with its warmth and love. He was beginning to know from personal experience what it meant to tread a lonely pathway, and to go through weakness and hardship without the support of friends who thought the same way about things. But after all, that was the way to grow strong and self-reliant. Pioneer missionary work required men—not mollycoddled weaklings! Hudson, delicate from childhood, was determined to be a pioneer missionary—and therefore he must be in every sense of the word, a man.

His parents, however, not unnaturally, were distinctly averse to his becoming a man if doing so involved returning to a diet of apples and brown bread, washed down by water. Indeed, they had grave doubts as to whether he would ever become one that way—even Hudson himself agreed the matter was open to question! Instead of living in the Soho boarding-house and buying his own food, it was decided he should obtain a position as doctor's assistant, where he could live with the family. This he did. He attended lectures at hospital in the morning, assisted his surgeon employer from dinner-time until nine-o'clock in the evening, and the rest of the day was his own—he could start studying for lectures then!

It was a strenuous life, certainly, but

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he was happy. Good food and a comfortable home did make a difference to his spirits, he found! And during the next six months he gained not only much useful medical knowledge and experience of human nature, but further evidence of what he knew to be of even greater importance—the help God would give in all matters about which he prayed.

One outstanding example was the case of the man with gangrene. A thoroughly hardened drunkard he was, and now he lay dying, though he did not know it.

"It's no use speaking to him about religion," Hudson was warned when he visited the home where the man lodged. "He's an atheist. He won't hear a thing about religion. We asked a Scripture reader to come and visit him once, and he got in a towering rage and ordered him out of the room." The Vicar of the parish had called, too. Alas, he was forced to depart in some confusion, for the infuriated invalid only permitted him to advance near enough to spit in his face! Hudson felt not unlike a gladiator entering the arena when he called for the first time to dress the man's foot. Speak to him about God's willingness to forgive his

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seek for water and go to the pits and find no water.

"Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place" (Jer.14:13). There is so much preaching in the church but it does not cast light on their fallen nature. The word 'Repentance' is not mentioned. Such are our leaders. God says He has not sent them. All the people who attend the Sunday services return empty as they do not get the Word, the 'Living Water.'

This chapter ends with the prayer of the prophet asking God not to forsake them. They would wait upon God. The only hope for the Christian church is Isaiah 64:4. "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." Those that wait for God in the midst of dark and hopeless situations will see the great things God has prepared for them which they never knew.

Without the knowledge of the Cross, you will dig into rocky places where you get no water. Even when we pray, we pray only according to our mind for our worldly needs. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

When you dig into the Word, your heart prompts you to pray for Divine things. When I was converted, for about ten years I never prayed for any earthly thing. I was not rich and had just a limited supply of earthly things. When you do not know how to pray, you are held up.

A Christian will not die in despair. There is deliverance for him. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). We should not be afraid of death. God's desire is to sanctify us and to make us like Him. Then our words will be orders to Nature like Jesus' words. Those that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

— Late Mr. N. Daniel

sins, and to receive him as the father received the prodigal, he must. Why, the man was dying! What hope was there for him in this world or the next, without God? But Hudson decided to wait a propitious occasion to broach the all-important subject. Until the angry and rebellious attitude had in some measure altered, it would be worse than useless to do so. He took special care in dressing the man's foot therefore, and said nothing about religion for several days. But the man was on his mind. He felt responsible for him, and many times a day Hudson prayed for him. "Learn to move men through God by prayer." If his prayers for the softening of hard hearts did not prove effective here in England, he could scarcely expect to be successful in heathen China.

Gradually the man's attitude changed. It changed first of all towards Hudson. The young medical student dressed his foot so carefully and skillfully that the pain was considerably eased, and he felt really grateful. Indeed, he went so far as to say so! This, surely, was the opportunity for which he had waited, thought Hudson. He explained to the man how he trusted in God to help him in all his medical work, and then went on to the subject of everyone's need of God's forgiveness and mercy.

Had he been the Scripture reader or the Vicar, he would probably have fared as they did! However, as he was the doctor, and able to relieve his pain, the man managed to swallow his anger, merely expressing it by turning his back without a word, and remaining there, with his face against the wall, until Hudson departed! It was not exactly encouraging, but at any rate it was a step in the right direction. The next day Hudson broached the subject again—with the same result. And after several more visits, his heart began to sink. Was it any use continuing? It seemed not. One day he felt so discouraged, so anxious about the man who, despite his ill-temper, was so often in his thoughts, that he felt something rising in his throat, and tears came to his eyes.

"Oh, friend, you must listen!" he exclaimed, and walked towards the bed. "Oh, if only you would let me pray with you!" and he found himself speaking in a broken voice, expecting the man to turn his back as usual. But the man did not. He looked with surprise at the over-wrought young doctor who was obviously so upset about something, and said:

"Well, if it will relieve you to do it, you can!"

It was scarcely a warm invitation, but Hudson needed nothing more. He knelt down, closed his eyes, and prayed aloud. Oh, that God would open the eyes of the dear man! Oh, that he might know that God was real, that Jesus Christ had died to save him from the punishment due for his sins, that forgiveness was his for the asking. The man lay silent, and although he made no comment then, it was evidently the real turning point in his life. No longer did he turn his back when Hudson spoke to him about God. The realization was dawning on him that what this earnest young man repeatedly told him was true. And if it were true—why not believe it? Why not...? And so it came about that one day Hudson left his patient's room almost walking on air. The previously bitter, hardened old man, who had not been inside a church for forty years, and then only to get married, was lying in bed, his eyes reverently closed, learning to pray to his God.

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