

ANN H. JUDSON  
An Unpublished Letter

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The present writer is currently heading a project in collaboration with the direct descendants of William Wilberforce, to transcribe and publish his *Spiritual Journals*, which after 200 years, still remain surprisingly unpublished. In the course of that research at Oxford University's Bodleian Special Collection's Library, several letters were discovered, written to the Wilberforce family from a number of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century 'spiritual giants'. These include letters from David Livingstone, Mrs. Charles Wesley, Andrew Fuller and also the letter published here, it is believed for the very first time, from the Baptist missionary to Burma, Ann Hasseltine Judson. It is interestingly a letter written not to Wilberforce himself, but to his beloved wife, Barbara.

Many Baptists especially, will be aware of Adoniram Judson, though one suspects nowhere near as much as Baptists used to be. Francis Wayland's 1853 biography of Adoniram Judson for example,<sup>4</sup> sold at least 26,000 copies in only its first year. One further suspects that Adoniram's wife's life and contributions, would be even less known, apart from maybe simply her name. This is nothing short of a tragedy and one that previous generations of believers would simply never have believed

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson*, (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1853).

could ever happen, especially since Adoniram has been the subject of at least 56 biographies,<sup>5</sup> and Ann herself has been the subject of a further 16 in her own right.<sup>6</sup> The 1830 biography of Ann Judson by JD Knowles<sup>7</sup> for example, which was regularly reprinted for the next quarter of a century after its initial appearance, was described as “a book so universally known that it scarcely need be mentioned.”<sup>8</sup>

Within just two weeks of their marriage, the Judsons sailed for India in February, 1812. Who could ever have foreseen what really lay ahead for this young Christian couple, lives that one writer described as being marked “by years of toil and hardship, loneliness and grief.”<sup>9</sup> Little wonder then, that in his *Advice to Missionary Candidates*, written after twenty years’ experience on the field, which included having to bury Ann and their children all lost to smallpox and other diseases, Adoniram would write, “It may be profitable to bear in mind, that a large proportion of those who come out on a mission to the East die within five years after leaving their native land. Walk softly, therefore; death is narrowly watching your steps.”

In 1822, Ann was suffering from a very serious liver disease and was told that she must return to either Europe or America for life-saving treatment. To spare her husband losing at least two years of field work at a very crucial time, Ann set sail at first for Britain, alone. It was during this two years away from Burma, that she wrote the letter that appears below. It speaks of the hardships they and she in particular, endured as pioneer missionaries. But this was not the first mention she makes of such things, for in an 1816 letter to her parents, Ann wrote, “But God has taught us by afflictions what we would not learn by mercies – that our

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<sup>5</sup> A tragedy Midwestern’s very own Provost, Dr. Jason G. Duesing, has sought to remedy with his, *Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary*, (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2006/issue90/8.2.html>.

<sup>7</sup> James D. Knowles, *Life of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah; with an account of the American Baptist Mission to that Empire*. (Philadelphia: 1830).

<sup>8</sup> Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 56.

<sup>9</sup> Sharon James, *My Heart in His Hands: Ann Judson of Burma*, (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1998), 78.

hearts are his exclusive property, and whatever rival intrudes, he will tear it away."<sup>10</sup>

Ann took the opportunity whilst in America, of publishing one of the first accounts of an American foreign mission actually written by a missionary, *A Particular Relation of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire*.<sup>11</sup> The proceeds were already earmarked for several projects in Burma, including buying the freedom of female slaves. After Ann had sufficiently recovered, she returned to Burma in 1824. In spite of all she would experience, Ann soon displayed significant language abilities, even surpassing Adoniram in her spoken Burmese. She became involved in actual translation work, resulting in not just several tracts being translated into Burmese, but the two complete books of Daniel and Jonah, together with a catechism that she actually wrote in the same language. Because of her interest in the many Siamese (Thai) in Burma, Ann began to learn Siamese too, and with her translation of Matthew's Gospel (as well as translating a number of other writings), she is celebrated as the first Protestant to translate any Bible book into Siamese.

In 1825, eight months after Adoniram was arrested and imprisoned in Burma under suspicion of spying, Ann gave birth to their daughter Maria. She would constantly visit the prison with the child, petitioning for Adoniram's release. In the midst of these great trials, she wrote the following:

Sometimes for days and days together, I could not go into the prison, till after dark, when I had two miles to walk, in returning to the house. O how many, many times, have I returned from that dreary prison at nine o'clock at night, solitary and worn out with fatigue and anxiety . . . and endeavoured to invent some new scheme for the release of the prisoners . . . the acme of my distress, consisted in the awful uncertainty of our final fate.

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<sup>10</sup> Knowles, *Life*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ann H. Judson, *A Particular Relation of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire: In a Series of Letters, Addressed to Joseph Butterworth, Esq. M.P.* (Washington City, 1823).

My prevailing opinion was, that my husband would suffer violent death; and that I should, of course become a slave, and languish out a miserable though short existence in the tyrannic hands of some unfeeling monster. But the consolations of religion, in these trying circumstances, were neither 'few nor small.' It taught me to look beyond this world, to that rest, that peaceful happy rest, where Jesus reigns, and oppression never enters.<sup>12</sup>

Ann died the following year, a premature death surely hastened by the horrendous journey she undertook to follow her husband to a prison he had been transferred to. This Article is by its very brief nature, unable to depict much at all of what both the Judsons achieved, but nor is it the aim. My aim is to challenge us all to read again, some of the great biographies of the men and women of God that have gone before. To be challenged, to be encouraged and most of all, to be reminded of the God they loved, served and worshipped. As a tribute to their immovable faith, Francis Wayland wrote the following in 1853:

They always enjoyed the most entire certainty as to the result of their labours, though occasionally doubting whether they would live to witness it. Their confidence rested solely and exclusively on the Word of God. They believed that he had promised; they doing as they believed his will, accepted the promise as addressed to them personally. Their daily work was a transaction between God and their own souls. It never occurred to them that God could be false to his promises.<sup>13</sup>

With the brief, preceding sketch above as the backdrop, we now have the opportunity to witness Ann Judson share word of the very real trials with significant religious doubts she endured, whilst on the mission field, doubts that she probably only ever shared with Adoniram and Barbara Wilberforce as here. She writes too though, of the faithfulness of God and

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<sup>12</sup> Knowles, *Life*, 239.

<sup>13</sup> Wayland, *Memoir*, Vol.1, 162-3.

the instrumentation of one particular book<sup>14</sup> that God used in her life, to resurrect her faith in her Savior. It is rightly said I believe, that with God there are no coincidences, and it is interesting to note that as a teenager under conviction of sin, the first instrument that God used, was a book by Hannah More with the innocuous title, *Strictures on Female Education*. It was when Ann read the phrase, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth," that she was immediately convicted. Hannah More was an English Evangelical poet and writer, a close friend of William Wilberforce and an active member with him in the Clapham Sect. It is also worth noting, that because the majority of Ann Judson's private papers, including her private Journals, were destroyed by herself in 1824 to prevent them falling into the hands of the Burmese,<sup>15</sup> the following letter is surely even more precious:

London, Bradford Square  
July 23 - 1822

My Dear Mrs. Wilberforce

It seems to have been the design of providence, that my wishes relative to an interview with yourself and Mr. Wilberforce should be frustrated, notwithstanding my endeavours to the contrary. I cannot however prevail on myself to leave England, without making some apology for the earnest desire I have manifested to intrude for a few hours, on that time so valuable to the public good.

My reasons were the following - to express to Mr. Wilberforce the happy effects produced by a perusal of his writings, of which I have been a witness in two cases, 2. To obtain some hints which might have been invaluable to us among the heathen. Four or five years ago, my mind, in consequence of my long residence in a heathen and a constant witness of idolatrous scenes, became harassed with doubts

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<sup>14</sup> William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. (London: 1797).

<sup>15</sup> Knowles, *Life*, Preface.

relative to the existence of an eternal God, and the divine authenticity of the Scriptures.

Mr. Judson was the only person to whom I could communicate my trials. He gave me Mr. W. View of Religion. A perusal of it was the means, not only of removing my doubts and restoring my mind to its former state of tranquility, but gave those high and elevated ideas which that work is so admirably calculated to produce. The transition from a state of darkness and distress, to light and joy was so great, that I was on the point of communicating to Mr. W. the change that work had been the means of effecting but the fear of intrusion prevented.

The other case was on board ship on my passage to England. Two young ladies on board, daughters of Sir. F.M. now in India, became the subjects of religious impression. I put into their hands the above mentioned book. It was the means of establishing and comforting their minds, and we entered into an engagement to read through that book once every year, beginning the first of March. I should have considered it a particular privilege to have communicated with Mr. W. on the best plans to be adopted, in introducing the Gospel among the Burmans, but it is none too late. Allow me my dear Madam to express my sense of kindness in Mr. W.'s letter of yesterday, and the hope that his valued life will long be continued a blessing to his Country and family. I embark this evening for Scotland, thence, after a few days, for America.

With best wishes for your health and happiness.

I remain

My dear Madam

Sincerely and respectfully yours

Ann H. Judson.