

Mrs. Judson on her Husband's Imprisonment in Burma:

A Letter to Mrs. J. Deakin of Glasgow.

Rangoon, May 12th, 1826.

My Dear Mrs. Deakin,

Yours of Aug. 1824 I received a few days ago, the only one since I left America. Had you received *all* I have written *you*, you would not ask if I "recollect once being with my friends in Sauchiehall." Indeed, my dear Mrs. D., my visit in Scotland made too deep an impression on my mind to be erased even to this day, and those loved friends I there met, are still ranked among the dearest on earth, and will I trust forever be associated with us in heaven. I most sincerely thank you for all the interesting particulars of my friends in Scotland, which you so kindly gave me. But what account shall I give you of myself, since my return to Burmah? Expect not to hear of the flourishing state of our schools, of the great increase of the Burman church, or rapid advance in favour of this intolerant Govt but prepare yourselves to hear of disappointments and vexations, of poverty and distress, of chains and wretchedness, and I may also add of the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God, who amid all our sufferings, "has never left or forsaken us," and who in his own time delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and brought us again to Rangoon, our old home. On our arrival at Ava, there was a fair prospect of succeeding in the schools. A school house was built, a teacher obtained, and four little girls had acquired the alphabet and began to read in words of four letters. Between three and four months from our arrival at the capital, Rangoon was taken by the English. This was at first joyful intelligence to us, not thinking what we had to suffer in consequence of it. Previous however to this event, all foreigners had been forbidden to enter the palace. This we considered as a piece of policy merely, and did not feel much alarmed for our own safety, till the three Englishmen residing in Ava, were arrested and put in confinement. At the same time it was intimated to the king, by some of the members of the Govt, to put in confinement the two teachers Judson and Price, but the king replied:—"They are Americans and true men let them remain." In examining the accounts of Mr. Gouge, one of the Englishmen, it was found that both of the teachers

had received money to a considerable amount from him, which was a sufficient evidence that they were in the employ of the British Govt and very probably spies. On this representation being made to his majesty, in an angry tone, he issued an order for their immediate arrest. It was on the memorable eighth of June, 1825, just as we were preparing to dine, that in rushed a dozen Burmans with an officer at their head, accompanied by *one*, whose spotted face denoted him a "son of the prison," and an executioner, and in the name of the king demanded Mr. J. The small chord, the instrument of torture was produced, Mr. J. thrown on the floor, his arms drawn so tight behind as to almost prevent his respiration, and in this manner dragged away and committed to the death prison. The horrors of that dreadful moment are so strongly imprinted on my mind, as to make me shudder in my relation, even at this distant period. My situation at this time was agonizing. Ignorant of the fate of Mr. J. I was left a solitary, un-protected female surrounded and closely watched by a guard of ten Burmans, whose delight seemed to be in the increase of my distress. As the night approached, I withdrew into an inner room with my four Burman children, and barred the doors. The guard spent the night in threatenings and abusive language, ordering me to unbar the doors and come out or they would beat the house down. I resolutely persisted in not unbarring the doors, and endeavoured to intimidate them, by saying I would complain of them to higher authorities on the morrow. Disappointed at my obstinacy, they took my two Bengalle servants and confined them in the stocks in a most painful position. But I soon obtained their release by promising a present of handkerchiefs in the morning. The next day I sent Mông Ing to ascertain the fate of Mr. J. and carry him some food if still living. Mông Ing returned with the intelligence that Mr. J. Dr. P. and the other white foreigners were confined in the death prison, in three pair of fetters each, and fastened to a long pole to prevent their moving. My greatest distress now arose from my confinement, as it precluded all hope of Mr. Js. release. I applied however to the Gov. of the City to remove the guard and allow me to go to *him*, with a present. My petition was granted and on the third day after Mr. Js. arrest I was allowed to visit him in prison, and after paying to the Gov. of the City 200 tickals, I obtained an order to remove Dr. P. and Mr. J. from the great prison into a small open shed in the prison enclosure. I next applied to the Queen, through the medium of her sister in law, for the release of the missionaries, stating particularly that they were Americans, and teachers of religion and had nothing to do with the war, or politics. Her majesty replied, "They will not die, let them remain in prison." There was but little hope of their release after this reply, but their

confinement was too distressing to allow of my remaining quiet so long as I had anyone to apply to. For seven months, almost daily, I made application to some member of Governnt, or of the royal family, but none dared to speak a word in favour of foreigners, so long as the english arms continued successful. After remaining eleven months in prison at Ava, Mr. Judson and the other white prisoners, in an unexpected moment, were taken out, ropes put round their bodies, tied two and two together, and in this way *driven* eight miles into the country, in the middle of the day without hat, or shoes. One of the poor fellows died on the way, through fatigue and ill-treatment, and Mr. J. did but just survive. He was in a high fever, his feet torn to pieces, and would never have reached the spot, but for a Bengalle servant, who tore up his headdress to bind Mr. J's feet, and assisted him in walking the two or three last miles. All the prisoners were put into a small wood prison, with one pair of fetters only, and excepting constant extortions from the jailors, found themselves more comfortable than at Ava. But my wretchedness, comparatively speaking, now commenced. While Mr. J. was in the prison at Ava, I was allowed to remain in our own house, where I had many conveniences left, and where I could supply Mr. J. and Dr. P. with food. But at this miserable place I had not one single comfort. I applied to the jailors to allow me to remain in the prison enclosure, but this they denied me, fearing it would be too great a gratification. A little bamboo *room* six feet long and five wide, not far from the prison, was all that I could obtain, and for this I was continually obliged to make presents. I should have mentioned, that all our property was confiscated in a few days after Mr. J's arrest, and we had been living for the year past on the little I had secreted, which was at this time so reduced as to make it difficult to satisfy the cravings of the jailors. Soon after our arrival at this place, my two little Burman girls were taken with the small pox. I immediately inoculated my little Maria, then an infant only three months old. The inoculation did not take, but some time after she caught it the natural way, and suffered extremely in consequence, and my watchings with her together with fatigue anxiety of mind and want of comfortable provisions, brought on one of the diseases of the country, from which there was no hope entertained of my recovery, and from which I did not entirely recover untill my arrival at the English camp. My poor little Maria was a sufferer indeed. My illness deprived her of nourishment, and neither a drop of milk, or a nurse could be obtained in the village. By bribing the jailors they sometimes allowed Mr. J. to come out of prison in his fetters, and take the little darling round to some of the Burmese women to beg a little nourishment. After remaining in the country prison six months, an order arrived for Mr. J's

release, and to be sent immediately to Ava. My name not being mentioned in the order, as I had not been sent there as a prisoner, the jailors took advantage of this circumstance, and forbid my accompanying Mr. J. I as resolutely however determined I *would* go, and bid defiance to their threats. But notwithstanding all my exertions, we were detained half a day, and it was not 'till I had given them almost everything remaining that they allowed us to depart. With joyful hearts we bade adieu to this scene of our suffering, tho' we knew not what awaited us in Ava. Mr. J. was conducted immediately to the court house, where he was detained two days, without being allowed to go to our house, and whence he was put on board a little boat and sent off to the Burman camp to act as interpreter. On his way down the river, he was allowed to land, for a few moments, opposite our house, when I had an opportunity of providing a few things for his comfort. He arrived at the Burmese camp in two days, where he was kept a close prisoner, without fetters, for six weeks almost in a state of starvation. Soon after his departure for the camp, as tho' my sufferings had not reached their height, I was taken with the spotted fever. I knew from the symptoms of the disease its dangerous nature, and without any medical attendance or scarcely any assistance, I concluded at once it would be fatal. But before I could sufficiently command my feelings "to set my house in order," and dispose of my little Maria, I lost my reason and was insensible to all around me. But my heavenly Father forsook me not in this wretched situation. Just at this period, Dr. Price was released from prison, and obtained leave to visit me. He saw my case was almost hopeless, but had recourse to the most energetic means, which were blessed to my recovery. My hair was shaven off, my head and feet covered with blisters, and every measure taken to recover my reason. A Bengalle servant, my only attendant told me my fever had run seventeen days, five or six of which I was insensible, and refused all nourishment. My recovery seemed to myself and all around me a perfect miracle. When the English army had nearly reached the Burmese camp, Mr. J. was instantaneously put on board a boat and sent off to town, with this communication only, "We have no farther need of Yudathan, and send him back to Ava." Mr. J. was conducted to the court house, thence to one of the City prisons, where he was ordered to remain 'till he could be sent back to the country prison. I was informed of his arrival, but had not so far recovered from my fever as to be enabled to lift my head from the pillow. Our faithful Mounge Ing, who had remained with us through all our difficulties, was despatched to a member of Govt, who had repeatedly tried to obtain Mr. J's release from prison, to induce him once more to make an effort and prevent

Mr. J's being sent into the country. He was successful in his application, the officer immediately petitioned Govt. offered himself as Mr. J's security, obtained his liberation, took him to his house, where he remained a prisoner at large till our final release. As soon as my health allowed, I was removed to the same house, where we received all the kind treatment and attention in the power of this officer to bestow. The Burmese Govt. now began to feel the necessity of consulting the missionaries relative to the means of saving their country which they saw on the eve of destruction. They consulted them in everything, and entreated Mr. J. to act as mediator between the two nations. But fearing it would prevent our removal from Ava, on which we had determined whenever we could, he declined, and advised them to apply to *****¹ who was very willing to accede to their wishes. Negotiations were **** on 'till they terminated in a treaty of peace, in which our release was included, and after an imprisonment of nearly two years, we found ourselves under the protection of the English flag, waving on the banks of the Ayanwatte at Yandaboo. Sir Archibald Campbell received us with all the kindness and hospitality in his power, pitched us a tent by that of his own, received us at ***** of the Burmese Govt all our ***** safely down to Rangoon in one of the gun boats. His kindness has made a lasting impression on our minds. My long letter warns me to desist, though I have not half done. But I must leave the remainder for another time. Mr. J. has written Mr. Deakin. The glasses for Mah-men-la have arrived. She will be delighted with them. Where is Mr. Barclay? I have received no letter from him since I left Scotland. My love ***** all my friends in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Our little Maria is now fifteen months old, a lovely child, with blue eyes and light hair. Her name is Maria Eliza Butterworth. The *next* shall be a Deakin. Pray for us that we may be faithful unto death.

Ever affectionately yours,

A. H. Judson.

¹ At these points the MS is no longer decipherable.