

Chapter 3
My Father

Dad had one desire in life, a desire that overshadowed everything else. He wanted to live and die for the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave a hundred percent of himself to serve as a missionary in China. To this day I regret not knowing more about my parents and their early lives. My two younger brothers and I attended the China Inland Mission schools in Chefoo on the coast. We came home for the winter holidays, leaving Chefoo about the first of December and arriving back there at the end of January. Three to four weeks of that time were taken up with travel. Even in the short time we were at home, Dad had to study for messages, write letters and reports, and more letters and more reports. And one week during that month he had to ride his bicycle a hundred miles to Hungtung to the annual Missionary Conference.

Because I planned after Chefoo, to pursue further education in the States and then return to China as a missionary, I spent one year at home with Mother and Dad, beginning to learn to read and write Chinese. This gave me one precious year of life with my parents.

James Hart Mellow was born May 17, 1880. His mother, Sarah Abbot had come from England as a five-year-old child. Little Jimmy Mellow was born in South St. Louis where he went to school until he was in the fifth grade, when his father died. Like many other boys of that day, he had to go to work because making enough money to help support the family was more important than securing a good education. He liked to talk of his experiences selling wallpaper at the John Wanamaker store. But even when he tried to tell me about his life in the USA, it seemed there were so few reference points, so few points of common understanding, that I failed to comprehend what he was talking about and forgot most of what he told me. He used to talk about the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, and related the unforgettable experience of standing

inside the mouth of a whale's skeleton. He worked a short time for the Fair while preparing to sail for China later that year.

After arriving in Shanghai and attending Language School, Dad was assigned to the southern province of Anhwei (rhymes with "*fan-why*"), but it seemed the climate didn't agree with him, and about 1911 he was reassigned to the province of Shansi (rhymes with *can see*) where he met Frances Mary McDonald at the city of Pingyao (rhymes with "*ring now*"). It didn't take Dad long propose to her and they were married in Pingyao in 1913.

Ruth was born in 1914, then I showed up in 1917, and Cliff arrived in 1920. Then, for health reasons, our family moved from Sichow in the hill country to Siaoyi down on the plain where the youngest brother Ted was born.

In my mind I remember Dad in those early years as a big, strong man, well able to take care of himself and his family, and fully capable of meeting any challenge. After we moved to Siaoyi (*rhymes with "wow-ee!"*), Dad found this place also to be unhealthy for us children in the hot summer months. Three thousand years ago this plain had been the bottom of a lake. In Abraham's time the Emperor Yu drained the lake into the Yellow River, turning the lake-bed into a fabulously fertile plain. But the sub-surface water level was no more than three or four feet below the surface, with the result that the whole area remained damp and disease-ridden, especially in the hot summer months. Dad looked for some relief and found a flourmill in the village of Yu-Tao-Ho, some twenty miles away, nestled in the hills just off the hot plain, where the temperature was considerably cooler. He bought the property and turned it into a lovely retreat for missionaries, which he named "Caara," an acronym from a verse in Mark 9:31 (KJV) "Come Apart And Rest Awhile." Water, diverted from a mountain stream, ran under the mill-room, turning one great millstone on top of another to grind wheat into flour. This room became

our living room, and Dad used one of the millstones as a picnic table in the yard. That place proved to be a real blessing for hot, weary, toiling missionaries. I recall that as a very small child I could see Dad busy with the work of making a number of missionaries happy. I did not understand what he was doing, but he always seemed to be working so that others could relax in comfort. A short distance upstream from Caara, a fine spring provided a beautiful setting for picnics.

Several shepherds tended their sheep on the hillside around Caara. Half a dozen flocks grazed together during the day while the shepherds sat together under a shade tree, smoking and talking. As the afternoon wore on, the shepherds walked away from each other and each one started calling his sheep. In just a half-hour or so, each sheep found its shepherd. Every sheep knew the voice of the shepherd and followed him.

Once we went to school in Chefoo we had no opportunity to spend time in Yu-Tao-Ho, as we stayed at school all summer. Early in December a number of students, the "Northern Party," sailed from Chefoo to Tientsin. Another group, the "Southern Party" sailed to Shanghai on their way to homes all over southern China. A smaller group sailed to Dairen on their way to homes in Korea.

One of the jobs that fell to Dad because he was the father of Chefoo students, involved taking his turn meeting us at the steamer in Tientsin and escorting the "Shansi Party" of about eight or ten students from Tientsin to Shansi. Then late in January he or one of the other Shansi fathers would escort the students back to Tientsin where they would catch the steamer back to Chefoo. As I look back now, I recognize some of the annoyances that Dad handled with composure. Once when we had to change trains at a station, Shih-Kia-Chuang, we waited *five days* for a train that was late. Bandits had cut the telegraph lines far out in the country, so there

was no means of communicating from one station to another. To make things difficult for repairmen, they even sawed off telephone posts. When repair teams went out to fix the lines, they simply stood the sawed off post beside the stump that stuck up out of the ground two or three feet, and bound them together with wire, even though this allowed the telegraph wires to hang dangerously low. All the time they worked they had to keep an eye open for snipers. Fortunately, at this particular station we had a comfortable hotel located at the end of the station platform. Several times a day we would hear the shout, "It's coming! The train is coming!" As quickly as possible, Dad would get us all down to the station platform where we would sit on our suitcases to keep them from being stolen. An hour or so later, it would become obvious that the call was a false alarm, and we would all have to trudge back to the hotel. On the fifth day the train actually arrived, as I remember, about ten o'clock at night. We sat on our suitcases while Dad investigated. There was no room on that train for our party of eight children and three or four adults, one of whom needed to go to a hospital on the coast for surgery. Once again we had to return to the hotel. Down on the platform, however, Dad struck up a conversation with a Chinese army general who invited us to ride on his armored train the next morning. The train would leave at 6:00 AM, would make only two stops and would reach our destination in eight hours. Fantastic! We found our place on the train. We stacked our luggage on the floor of what was a large steel box on wheels. The temperature was between zero and five degrees. A huge door on each side stood wide open, and we sat precisely between those two doors in Arctic comfort! The train pulled out of the station at 8.00, two hours later than we had been told. Although we were scheduled to make only two stops, less than ten minutes after leaving the station the train had its first stop – an axle bearing was overheating. That night my youngest brother, Ted, sat on top of a pile of trunks, sound asleep. In his sleep he swung his feet and

unconsciously kicked a Chinese soldier. The soldier drew his gun and was about to shoot the "foreign devil" that kicked him. Dad came to the rescue and talked the soldier into civility. Instead of an eight-hour trip, twenty-six hours passed before we arrived in Tientsin, and we found ourselves at the wrong station. Securing rickshaws to transport the party to our destination at the Mission Home presented another unexpected challenge.

I was amazed at Dad's ability in every situation. He handled us impatient kids in that miserable situation when the train was late, then made contact with a general and arranged the use of his train. Even in the biting cold weather, with his irrepressible sense of humor, he kept us kids as happy as possible, telling stories. In the middle of the night he managed to suppress what might have led to an international incident. He handled the task of delivering the party to the Mission Home as simply one more detail.

I am proud of my father. Although he had only limited formal education, he was well read in both English and Chinese. Not only was he a serious student of the Bible, he also studied thoroughly "The Analects of Confucius," and many other works which gave him a deep background in Chinese thinking. At the table during our winter holidays he delighted in telling us stories he had been reading in some of his Chinese books. He demonstrated a deep commitment to serving others. As I think of him, I see his eyes dancing and his mouth wide open in a deep-felt laugh. On the other hand, he had a temper that sometimes caused him trouble, especially when things did not go as he thought they should. There were times when he treated his own children more harshly than he should, but that temper reflected a character of steel as he served the Lord under trying circumstances. At the same time he displayed a tender heart of love and compassion as he worked in famine relief and other tasks where he demonstrated a deep love for God and man. There were times when he became desperately tired in his service for the Lord. I

recall one occasion when at the close of a particularly hard week, he was on his knees in prayer with a number of the church leaders, and fell sound asleep. He was embarrassed as one of the elders had to waken him.

I remember a time during the final year I spent at home, when I was alone riding my bicycle from Yu –Tao-Ho back to Siaoyi. Suddenly I had bicycle trouble. I don't remember just what my problem was. Although I could speak very little Chinese, I stopped at the nearest house and tried to explain my problem. The man asked my name, and when I told him, he became excited. About fourteen years earlier, in 1921 Dad had administered famine relief, and this man remembered him. He could not do enough for Pastor Mellow's son.

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(The following anecdote concerns a trip I took with Dad during the year from mid-1934 to mid-1935.)

Bike-Ride with Dad

All night long the sad sounds of death maintained their mournful dirge from the house of the necromancer, our next-door neighbor. As a necromancer he claimed supernatural ability to communicate with departed spirits, and now he mourned the death of his wife. Blow upon blow, as he pounded the nails into the coffin, we heard the pathetic cry of the distraught husband, "Look out, Mother, for the nails!" Although our hearts bled for the sorrow of the family, we had been unable to establish any contact with them, and we came near tears as we recognized their utter hopelessness.

But now it was time for Dad and me to leave home on our bicycles.

With our 30-pound bundles tied securely to the carriers over the rear wheels of the bicycles, Dad and I rode along the muddy street, the main street of the town. A quarter mile up the street we rode under a tower filled with idols displaying utterly hideous faces. From the four

corners of the tower's roof hung bronze bells producing a pleasant sound as they swung in the breeze. The bells were intended to convey some kind of a message to spirit beings somewhere.

We turned left under the tower that stood over the intersection, and started out to visit some homes in a district known as "The Western Hills". It was a real pleasure to leave the town with all the fragrances of raw sewage running down the cartwheel tracks in the street and the smell of pigs raised in atrocious pigpens. The Chinese built these pigpens behind the outdoor toilets, on the theory that what the human digestive system could not process should provide the pigs with the nourishment they needed.

In spite of the stench of the pigpens, the fragrance of noodles and pork and other delicious foods reminded me of the many delicious meals I have enjoyed in various delightful little shops. As we left town we also left behind us the sounds of happy children playing in the streets, and the shouts of noisy merchants and customers accusing each other of cheating.

What a joy to leave all the sights, sounds and smells of the town and get out into the fresh air! There was still the ubiquitous, gritty dust, but we had long ago become accustomed to that, and we enjoyed the fresh air of the country for a delightful change.

We appreciated that fresh air all the more after we successfully passed a slow-moving cart loaded with odiferous "honey-buckets" filled with what had been retrieved from the outdoor privies in town during the wee hours of the morning. The farmer would soon dump his prized fertilizer on top of a huge manure-pile where it would mature, and at the appropriate time he would spread it on his fields.

Our "road" had been created immediately after the spring planting season, when the farmers had ploughed their fields paying no attention to any paths that crossed those fields. All the ground must be ploughed, and travelers would simply have to find their own way. The first

cart simply crossed the field in as straight a line as the driver could manage, dodging around the farmer as he ploughed with his ox. That first cart left a pair of ruts that would define the road until the next time the field would be plowed. Every cart would follow in the same tracks. Hundreds of pedestrians had added three tracks separated by the two cartwheel ruts. The soft loess soil had been ground into a fine layer of dust, most of the time just barely covering the ground, but at other times two, three or four inches deep, or even deeper. The slightest breeze could stir this dust into a choking fog that would make breathing difficult. But the weather today, warm and sunny, encouraged us as we pedaled along the narrow paths.

Among other responsibilities, Dad particularly wished to see a man in one of the villages, a faithful elder in the local church. This man was desperately ill, and Dad wanted to visit him before he died. The elder lived in a cave, an artificial cave. It was an interesting home consisting of three rooms. Each room was walled with brick in an arch shape. The central room was perhaps twelve feet wide and may be eighteen feet long. At the center the arched roof was about ten feet high. The side rooms were a little smaller, perhaps ten feet wide and fifteen feet long and only seven or eight feet high. The central room was paved with bricks about twelve inches square. The floors in the side-rooms were simply clay that had been hardened with years of tramping.

From the street, a heavy wooden door indicated access to the central room. On each side of that door, a window made of paper stretched over a flimsy wooden framework allowed a tiny bit of light into that main room, and two more paper windows beyond these, indicated the side rooms. The wife of the sick elder greeted us at the door, thanking us effusively for coming, and led us into the central room, where we parked the bicycles. Walking timidly past the big old black dog, I asked Dad what was wrong with the elder. Quietly he said, "Smallpox!"

Entering the side room from the middle room, we had to lift a heavy wadded curtain, a thick, dark blue quilt that hung over a low doorway. I was surprised at its softness. We had to bend low to avoid bumping our heads on the heavy wooden lintel. Behind us the soft curtain fell easily into its place, blocking out any possibility of air circulation. Certainly there could be no danger of the sick man suffering from a draft of cold air. The paper window allowed for no ventilation. Coming into such a confined space after riding several hours in the lovely open air provided a shock hard to forget.

Dad walked over to the sickbed where the elder was lying on a "kang," a brick-bed in a corner of the gloomy room close to the paper window. As Dad reached out his hand and touched this man dying of smallpox, I stood several feet behind him, almost nauseated by the stench of the stale air, and admittedly scared at being so close to such a sick man. True, I had received a smallpox vaccination when I was born sixteen years ago, but . . . At the same time I was proud of my father who showed no hesitation as he expressed the love of God to this man who had served his Master faithfully. *What a contrast, I thought, between the hopelessness of the necromancer we heard this morning, as he pounded the nails into his mother's coffin, and the contentment of this desperately ill elder who was about to enter the presence of his Savior.* I don't remember anything about what Dad said to this beloved elder, or anything about his prayer. I remember only that I was more than happy to leave that home with its putrid air, and get on my bicycle to go to the next family Dad needed to visit.

As we left that sickroom I had a new appreciation of my Dad, and at the same time felt a powerful revulsion for the sadness, sickness and stench of the country. *Today, I thought to myself, "I have a fresh appreciation of the wise old saying, 'China is truly the land of pagodas and pig odors.'"*

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