

# Eric Liddell

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# 1

## *China*

**A** vast, colorful land of beauty and mystery, China has always held a fascination for the rest of the world. Although, in the past, few visitors ever ventured there and those who did were rarely welcomed by its people.

Surrounded by dense forest, arid desert and high mountains, and the Pacific Ocean to the east, it is perhaps understandable why China received so few visitors from the outside world. Still, almost from its beginning, China was constantly being invaded and overcome by its nearest neighbors—Manchuria, Tibet, Turkestan and Mongolia. Each conqueror set up a new dynasty and when the last one, Ch'ing, drew to a close in 1912, there had been no less than twenty ruling dynasties, or families.

In an effort to keep invaders from China's territory, the Great Wall was built in the third century B.C. This, of course, only made the vast nation more isolated from the rest of the world and foreign traders.

Having been a self-sufficient country with its own foodstuffs, merchandise, fuel and minerals, it may seem unreasonable that the Chinese would want trade with anyone outside their own borders. However, there was a very good reason for it.

In the remote past, bartering had been the normal trading method in China until it was realized that coins made from precious metals were more durable than payment with livestock or food. China was the first country in the world to make coins. They were produced in various sizes, each size carrying a different value, and were made of silver, one of the few metals China could not produce. Trading in a metal which was abundant would have been of little use, because it would have had little value. China needed an export trade.

The goods most popular with foreign merchants in exchange for the treasured metal were tea, cotton, porcelain, rice, silk and jade. But before long, unscrupulous dealers began to pay for goods with something costing far less than silver. Opium began to be imported into the country and soon most of China's exports were being traded for the evil drug rather than for the silver she needed so much.

People in high places fell under the corrupt influence of opium, and soon China was not only being exploited by foreign merchants, but by its own government officials—even by the Emperor's court itself.

With wealth finding its way into the wrong hands, the economy began to fail and China headed for poverty.

When the Great Wall failed to keep out invaders, China turned against them, invaded their lands, and

took them over along with their people. This meant five hundred million mouths to feed. With general neglect throughout the land, famines occurred regularly. Ten million people died in one such famine.

By the nineteenth century, due to education, new discoveries, and inventions, western countries were being modernized. On the contrary, Chinese rulers were doing nothing for their people and the peasants' anger began to rise. Rebellions broke out everywhere and millions more died.

Russia, Japan, Britain and France wanted to establish diplomatic relations with China. Because of the wicked opium dealers and China's selfish rulers, the country was in a hopeless state and unable to defend itself. Countries took advantage of her. War broke out, and the modern-day invaders occupied large areas of China, including the capital of Peking.

Eventually a conditional peace was made between Britain and China. A treaty was signed in 1858 at Tientsin, a northeastern city. The terms included the opening of more ports to foreign traders. The valuable trading port of Hong Kong became a British Colony. China had to accept foreign ambassadors and grant concessions—foreigners would live under their own laws and government in certain areas of the country. Some Chinese would be permitted to live inside the concessions but they would be ruled by that country's laws. Furthermore, Christian missionaries were allowed to live in the country and move about freely, teaching their beliefs to the Chinese who already had several gods of their own.

The conditions of the treaty resulted in many Chinese people hating everyone and anything out-

side their own country and culture.

They thought westerners rude and uncivilized; too loud. They didn't bow or smile appropriately. They ate their food in great mouthfuls using metal knives and forks, instead of taking dainty portions like the Chinese did, eating with bamboo or ivory chopsticks.

But for every Chinese who hated the foreigners, there was another who hated their own ruler even more.

When the Emperor Hsien Peng died in 1861, he left his five-year-old son to succeed him. Of course no child of that age could actually rule a nation. In such cases, the country was to be ruled by a Regency—a group of people sharing the responsibility for running the country until the rightful ruler was capable. The Emperor's widow Tz'u Hsi was to be one of this group, but because she disapproved of the other three Regents, she had them murdered and took charge of China herself, ruling the way she wished.

A part of Peking is called the Forbidden City—a cluster of palaces built closely together. In one of them Tz'u Hsi sat on the turquoise and jade encrusted gold Dragon throne. She wore beautiful robes of jeweled satin, heavily embroidered with gold thread. Her fingernails were several inches long to show that she never did any work.

Thousands of servants ministered to her every whim, and when she wanted to move from room to room—the Forbidden City palaces have 9999 rooms—she was carried on a litter because her feet were never to touch the floor. Gongs and bells warned of her approach, giving others time to clear the path

for the procession. Stone and bronze lions and unicorns flanked the litter.

Some of the palaces were situated on islands in the lakes—right in the middle of Peking—and if the Empress fancied visiting one of them or going for a picnic to the lake, a matter of minutes away, dozens of servants accompanied her.

They carried several changes of clothing, umbrellas, parasols and fans in case she got too warm, too cold; the sun was too hot or it rained. Doctors also accompanied her with medicine and pills in case she fell ill on the journey. Food and drink by the caseful was also taken in the event she became hungry or thirsty.

She had her own theater in one of the palaces but it was no honor to entertain her. If she wasn't thoroughly pleased with a performance, the entertainer was severely punished.

When the young Emperor T'ung Chih eventually came to the throne, to his mother's great disappointment, he was very impressed with the modern ways of the western world. Determined to lift China out of centuries of despair, he encouraged the young people to travel abroad. They would learn and adopt new ideas from other countries. He also built a university in Peking where returning students could educate even more of the youth of China.

His mother was outraged, and felt no remorse when her son died in 1875 at the age of nineteen, leaving a pregnant widow.

Tz'u Hsi was so worried her grandson would be like his father she hastily arranged to have her sister's son crowned Emperor before her own grandson was



born. Her nephew being a young child, she became Regent again until he came of age.

He ascended the Dragon throne in 1889 but to his aunt's horror he was the same sort of ruler her son had been. Intending to improve China's economy, he allowed foreign industrialists to build railways while others opened tin and iron mines.

Of course Tz'u Hsi saw her nephew as a traitor to old ways and beliefs, so she plotted against him.

China abounded with illegal secret societies at that time. The most evil of these was the White Lotus Society. An offshoot of it, even more criminal and evil than the main body, called themselves the Ho Chuan—Fists of Righteous Harmony. In the West they were known as the Boxers, a title that came from their training methods which included punching hard objects to make their fists as strong as steel.

The Boxers were filled with hate for all foreign things and foreign people. Their sole aim was to rid China of anything that didn't belong there. They were so harsh that if a Boxer broke a society rule, not only was he put to death but also his entire family.

Although Tz'u Hsi knew these secret societies were illegal, she set about giving this particular one all the help she could.

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At the time of this upheaval in China, 5,000 miles away in a small Scottish village near Loch Lomond, lived a grocer and his family.

The Liddells paid scant attention to what was going on in that strange, oriental land across the seas. They were occupied with bringing up their family,

selling food to the villagers of Drymen, and running a transport service for passengers and mail to and from the railway station, with a little cart and white pony.

They were pleasant, hard-working, neighborly people, though quiet and reserved. Their reservation was dropped, however, when they attended religious meetings in the village square. They sang loudly and proudly.

Their neighbors were surprised at this undisguised display of devotion. Some were mildly amused or embarrassed by it, others were quite critical.

The Liddells' son James was apprenticed to a draper in the city of Stirling, a few miles away from his native village. James was content with his choice of career until one year when he went on vacation and met William Blair, a Congregational Church minister. Coming from a strong Methodist family himself, James soon formed a close friendship with the Reverend Blair. The two discussed the church and its work, and in particular, the work of its missionaries abroad.

After that particular vacation, James was unsettled. It was as though something new had awakened in him which had nothing to do with the drapery business. He felt called to church work and to a far-off land. But where? No name came to him immediately, but he was sure God had some mission in mind.

Mary Reddin was working as a nurse in a Glasgow hospital. She was a young girl from Berwickshire, a border county between England and Scotland. She had recently been ill and some friends invited her to

their home in Stirling for a short convalescent period. While she was there she attended the annual Sunday school picnic with her friends.

Young James Liddell attended also and they were introduced to each other. As neither of them were from the area, they felt a bit out of place with the others, and spent the entire afternoon together. Mary explained how she happened to be there, and James told her how his outlook on life had recently changed, and that he was planning to become a minister. Mary was deeply impressed with his calling, and was as interested in the subject as he was.

In the pretty, dark-haired girl, James saw a sweet-natured, sympathetic character. In him, Mary saw a bighearted man who was only too happy to leap from his chair to tend to the needs of others, even a stranger like herself, who was still feeling rather poorly.

During her stay in Stirling they met frequently, and when Mary was back nursing in Glasgow they wrote regularly. Before long they realized they were very much in love and James asked her to marry him. Mary accepted at once. However, James had another question for her. Would she be willing to be not only the wife of a minister, but the wife of a missionary to foreign a land? Without a moment's hesitation Mary said she would go to the ends of the earth with him.

James immediately applied for an ordination course in Glasgow, and Mary stood beside his proud family and friends when they later attended his ordination at the Dundas Street Congregational Church.

Now with his long hours of study behind him, they thought they could soon be married, but there were other delays, and it was not to be—not yet.

James was determined to take up missionary work immediately, so he applied to the London Mission Society for their specialist course in working abroad.

It was 1897, the same year that the Chinese Empress Tz'u Hsi joined forces with the secret society of Boxers.

James and Mary were disappointed to be told they could not marry until James had completed this second course and done a year's missionary work in a foreign country.

Passing his exams would not necessarily mean the Reverend James Liddell would make a good missionary. Only practical experience could decide that. As it would be very costly for the society to send Mary abroad too, James would have to prove himself worthy of his calling before she could join him.

He worked diligently to complete the London Mission Society course and pass his exams and did so quite easily. Then, although he was a patient man, excitement mounted in him daily as he waited to hear where his official posting would be. Finally it arrived. He would be sent to Mongolia in the far north of China.

Mary was equally excited when she heard the news. Once James had a few months' work experience behind him in China, she was certain to be setting sail from her native Scotland to join the man she loved. They had not seen very much of each other during his studies because Mary had gone to work on the island of Lewis, one of the Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland. Girls from all over the mainland found work there in the summer herring season, and because accidents were common with the sharp

knives used for gutting fish, there was also a lot of work for a good nurse like Mary Reddin.

The year was 1898 when James Liddell set sail from England. The whole of China was in turmoil. The young Emperor Kuang Hsu had opened some old Buddhist temples to use as extra schools for Chinese children and his aunt was furious with him. She'd always believed him to be a traitor to his country. Now she feared the Dragon throne itself was in danger.

Kuang Hsu suspected his role as China's ruler was being threatened, perhaps even his life, so he arranged to have his aunt arrested and exiled to the Summer Palace where she could exercise no power.

Instead, the old Empress had him arrested as a traitor and banished to the very "prison" he had planned for her. With him went the wife he hated, whom his aunt had chosen for him, while Pearl, the wife he loved, was thrown down a well to her death.

The Summer Palace stood on an island in the Lake of Pure Rippling Waves in the Forbidden City. It wasn't actually a prison except in the sense that the Emperor was never allowed to leave it. Moored in the lake close by the Summer Palace, was a full-sized replica of a Mississippi paddle steamer constructed in pure white marble. Here the old Empress spent long, sunny afternoons much to her nephew's annoyance. Kuang Hsu knew that she had bought it with money given her for the benefit of China's poor.

With Kuang Hsu out of the way, Tz'u Hsi, at the age of sixty-three, took control of the Chinese Empire for the third time in her life. More than ever she was determined to rid the land of aliens, and most of all,

their Christianity—and the dreaded secret society of Boxers came out in open revolt to side with her.

The whole world sensed a great rebellion was simmering in China. It was only a question of when it would erupt.

James knew all of this before he sailed but he didn't know as much about China and her people as he thought he did.

He had always thought they were a race of small stature, and was surprised to see that northerners were quite tall. They were slow in their movements, and neither as talkative or excitable as he'd expected. He was shocked to learn of the little value placed on life. People tended to care only for themselves. Beggars starved in the streets; no one cared or seemed to notice. They were of no value or importance.

Animals were less than nothing, and a dog lying in the street was as likely to be kicked by a passerby as would a stone or tin can. In fact they derived pleasure from kicking animals.

Girls were treated much the same as animals, sometimes worse. A man cared more for his mule than his daughters; they were of no value at all. Girls were often killed at birth or put out in the street to die. No one saw anything wrong in this. They were only girls.

Often missionary families or Chinese Christian converts would take these abandoned children into their own homes. They would even buy a slave girl from her owner; not something a Christian would ever do gladly. Yet, in these circumstances it was the only way to save such a young girl from a terrible life—or death.

When missionaries first worked in China they were concerned mainly with bringing the teachings of Christ into the country. Eventually they introduced education and modern medicine. For the first time hospitals and clinics were available to the peasants.

Schools were built for the poor and girls were encouraged to attend too. Until then, not even the richest Chinese bothered to educate their daughters.

James soon discovered the most difficult part of his studies was to learn the Chinese language. Without it he could not hope to pass his final exams.

There were almost two languages—one for the highly educated, another for those who never learned to read or write but simply spoke the language.

The language known as *kwan hwa* has 50,000 characters. Only the most scholarly know them all. Even children need to know at least 3,000 characters before they can write the most basic Chinese, called *wen hwa*. Quite a contrast to the 26 letters we need to discover our entire English language.

James was so determined to succeed that to everyone's surprise, especially his own, he learned *wen hwa* Chinese within the first year. Still, it took him six long years to complete his training—first as a church minister, and finally as a missionary.