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A NEW BIOGRAPHY OF THE
OLYMPIC CHAMPION WHO INSPIRED
CHARIOTS OF FIRE

DAVID McCASLAND

AUTHOR OF THE AWARD-WINNING BIOGRAPHY OF OSWALD CHAMBERS

Eric Liddell: Pure Gold
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Editor's Note: In accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style*, abbreviations
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In material quoted from articles and letters, place names and abbreviations
appear as they were originally written.

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For Patricia, Heather, and Maureen



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A Word About China



In this book I have chosen to employ the spelling of Chinese place names most commonly used by Westerners during Eric Liddell's lifetime. One exception is the use of Peking throughout the text, even though it became known as Peiping in 1928. A list of Chinese place names and their modern Pin Yin equivalents follows. It should be noted that the spelling of place names in China varied widely and was always changing; thus, the spelling in quoted correspondence may vary slightly from the glossary below. For example Tingchow-fu might be spelled Ting Chow, Ting-Chow, or Tingchow.

To many people in modern China the word "coolie" is offensive. During the historical period of this book, however, the word, as it was commonly used by foreigners, meant simply a Chinese worker who did hard labor for little pay.

Former Name	Pronounced	Modern Spelling
Ch'ao Yang	chow YAHNG	Chaoyang
Chefoo	chee FOO	Yantai
Chinwangtao	chin wang DOW	Qinhuangdao
Chungking	chung KING	Chongqing
Dairen	DIE ren	Dalian
Harbin	har BEAN	Harbin
Heng Shui	hung SHWEE	Hengshui
Honan	huh NAHN	Henan
Hsin Chi	sin CHEE	Shulu
Mukden	MOOK den	Shenyang
Nanking	Nan KING	Nanjing
Peitaiho	bay duh HUH	Beidaihe
Peking	pee KING	Beijing
Shanhaikwan	shan hai GWAN	Shanhaiguan

Former Name	Pronounced	Modern Spelling
Shanghai	shang HI	Shanghai
Shantung	shan DUNG	Shandong
Siaochang	SHAO zhahng	Zaoqiang
Taku	TAH Koo	Tangu
Techow	DER joe	Dezhou
Tientsin	tee in SIN	Tianjin
Tingchow-fu	ting chow FOO	unknown
Tsangchow	SAHNG joe	Cangzhou
Tsinan	jee NAHN	Jinan
Tsingtao	CHING dow	Quingdao
Weih sien	way SHIN	Weifang

Prologue:

Please Don't Go!



May 1941

Florence Liddell winced as the cabin floor shuddered slightly beneath her feet. Far below the water line, the Nita Maru's engines rumbled to life, signaling that departure was nearing. Soon all guests would be required to leave the ship, and the gangway linking ocean liner to land would be removed. In years past, the prospect of a trans-Pacific journey always filled Flo with anticipation and excitement, but not today.

She glanced across the cabin at four-year-old Heather playing on the floor, then shifted her eyes to Patricia, sitting on Eric's knee. The little girl's hazel eyes looked straight into the eyes of her father as he spoke in what seemed to be unusually serious tones.

"Tricia," he said, "you're almost six years old and you're a big girl now. I want you to look after your mother, and I want you to look after Heather and help with this new baby that's coming. And I want you to promise me you'll do this until I return."

Tricia's golden curls bobbed as she nodded ascent to his every word.

"I promise," she said. "I promise."

To Flo, it seemed strange to be traveling on a Japanese ship, since that country's aggression in China was the main reason she and the children were leaving. But Eric had insisted it would be the safest way. Hitler was overrunning Europe, and no one could predict what would happen in Asia. Flo and the girls would be safer in Canada. She could have the baby there, and he would join them at the earliest opportunity. For now, he felt an obligation to the London Missionary Society and to his colleagues to stay in China during these

days of crisis and uncertainty. It would be a long two years apart, but it was best this way. Two years—it couldn't be more than that.

They had talked so much about this day that now, with nothing left to say, they spoke through their eyes and touch. How Flo loved him, this man she knew better than anyone on earth. Why did it seem they were always saying good-bye? Since the day they announced their engagement, they had been apart more than together.

And then it came. A ringing of bells, a loudspeaker announcement, and a blast from the ship's deep-throated whistle. They embraced and kissed, then Eric was gone. For a few minutes, Flo and the two girls sat in the cabin. Then they rushed upstairs to the ship's railing.

Tricia was the first to spot her father striding away on the pier, unmistakable in his sport shirt, white shorts, and knee-length socks. "There he is!" she shouted. Eric was nearly bald, but the spring in his step hinted at the athletic power that had carried him to a gold medal in the Olympics more than a decade and a half before. Suddenly, he turned and looked back at the ship. The girls waved frantically and Florence began to shout:

"Eric, don't go! Please don't go! I want to stay here with you! Please! Please don't go!"

She tried to run toward the gangway, but her feet refused to move. She shouted again, "Don't go!" Patricia wrapped her arms around her mother's waist and tried to comfort her, "It's all right, Mother. It's all right." Flo continued to cry out through her sobs. Then Eric faded from view and she felt herself cradled by loving arms. Slowly she awakened.

Sitting on the edge of Flo's bed, Patricia stroked her mother's white hair and held her against the terror that had invaded the night.

"It's all right, Mother. It's all right," Patricia said. "You were having a bad dream. Everything's all right now."

"It was so real," Florence said. "He was right there and I didn't want him to go. But when it happened I never shouted or begged him to stay."

“It was a long time ago,” Patricia said.

“Yes,” Florence said, regaining her sense of time and place. “A long time ago.”

“Now we’re at my house in Canada,” Patricia said. “It’s 1984.”

Florence took a deep breath. So much had happened since that day in 1941 when their ship sailed from Japan. Maureen’s birth in Toronto followed by the shock of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The years of waiting and praying after Eric and thousands of others were imprisoned in North China. Then the numbing news of his death.

For half a dozen years after Eric died, it was just the four of them: Florence, Patricia, Heather, and Maureen. Then Flo married Murray Hall, a Canadian farmer, and they brought another daughter, Jeannie, into the world. Following Murray’s death from pulmonary complications came the incredible surprise of *Chariots of Fire*, the moving story of Eric’s Olympic victory and his deep Christian conviction. The Academy Award-winning film had rekindled all Flo’s memories.

She loved the movie. Despite all its dramatic liberties, the film captured Eric’s winsome and humble spirit. Flo liked the Eric Liddell portrayed on screen, but she loved the real man far more. The mischievous Eric with the twinkling blue eyes and dry sense of humor. The shy Eric who agonized over speaking in public. The determined Eric who defied convention to court and wed her, a young woman nearly ten years his junior. The devoted Eric who loved God with all his heart.

Flo wasn’t surprised that the world had come to admire the quiet Scotsman whose refusal to run on Sunday stood as a landmark of personal conviction. But there was so much more to the man she knew and loved. His lighthearted sense of fun, his deep compassion, his unselfish giving. How could anyone tell it all?

After her dream, Flo poured out a flood of memories as she and Patricia talked into the early hours of the morning. Perhaps she sensed that her own race was nearing its end. She had kept running all these years as part of her promise to Eric, to the girls, and above

all to God. It had never been a race against the clock, but a contest against dark days of loneliness, heartbreak, and despair. She had met every obstacle head on with great faith and enthusiasm, determined to live and complete her most important task.

When Florence died on June 14, 1984, her obituary in the *Toronto Star* read: “*Chariots of Fire* widow dead at 72.” It seemed appropriate that she and Eric should be linked again in death, as they had been in life.

Through an inspiring film, the world knows something of the Eric Liddell who ran for gold at the Paris Olympics in 1924. This is the larger story of the man who went the distance in life, and of the woman who ran with him in his greatest race.

PART I



THE MAKING OF A CHAMPION

1902–1924

*Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side!
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide—
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best thy heavenly friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

A North China Childhood

1902–1907

With a bump against the dock at Techow, the long, narrow houseboat reached the end of its two-hundred mile journey. For more than a week the Rev. James D. Liddell and his family had been winding their way south from the city of Tientsin along the Grand Canal. Now they faced a grueling overland journey to their mission station at Siaochang. James glanced at the November sky, relieved that it didn't look like snow.

From the deck, Chinese men wearing the traditional pigtail stepped ashore carrying immense parcels wrapped in rough burlap and tied with rope. Along the quay, coolies swarmed around shouting, shoving, and cursing, fighting for the heaviest items, hoping to carry something in exchange for a few coppers. Nearby, street vendors selling food and drink sat next to women sharpening scissors and men giving haircuts. To a Western observer it seemed like utter chaos and confusion. For the seasoned missionary it was just a normal scene in China.

James shouted in Chinese, giving instructions for the luggage and bargaining for the price all in one breath. From the tumult on the dock, two rickshaws carried the Liddell family and their belongings along the crowded streets to a crude Chinese inn where they would spend the night. Two-year-old Rob jabbered away in Chinese while Eric, ten months, slept soundly in his mother's arms. Through weary eyes, thirty-one-year-old Mary Liddell scanned the now-familiar sights of a Chinese town. Compared to the city of Tientsin, the town of Techow felt like the end of the world. Although Techow was an important trading center, it was hardly a destination for anyone but the common people who lived in the town and on the surrounding

plain. It certainly was not listed in the Thomas Cook guide of fascinating places to visit in North China.

Before Mary awoke the next morning, James had carefully loaded their belongings in two wooden-wheeled carts. He believed in packing properly the first time instead of repacking many times along the way. Since the carts had no springs and the roads they would be traveling were little more than ruts, a tightly tied load was imperative. The forty-mile trip to Siochang would take most of two days if everything went well. If they broke an axle or encountered bandits, it would be a different story. In the first light of morning, James made a final inspection of the carts, then stepped back to photograph the carters as they hitched the mules. Before leaving, he carefully hid his camera deep in a bundle of clothing in Mary's cart. A bandit would have to dig deep to find that precious treasure.

After a quick breakfast and a hot cup of tea, James loaded Mary and the boys into one cart and walked beside them as the mules pulled the carts toward the ferry at the Grand Canal. Slowly the barge moved them through the muddy waters of the 1,200-mile-long waterway that was a lifeline of trade from Hangkow in the south to its northern terminus at Peking. Safely on the other side, the carts trundled down a dusty path, jostling and jolting the Liddells westward toward Siochang.

A veteran missionary once said that the most comfortable way to travel in a Chinese cart was to pad it well with many thicknesses of quilts, put plenty of pillows at the back and sides, arrange several rugs for covering, and then—walk! It would be a long, rough ride for Mary, but the boys didn't mind a bit. Robbie considered it all a great adventure, and Eric made his feelings known only when it was time to eat. From time to time, Mary lifted the blanket covering Eric's face and gazed at his snippets of blond hair and the dimple in his chin. She loved her boys and couldn't imagine life without them.

Despite the fine dust billowing from the rolling wheels of the carts, it was a glorious winter day on the North China Plain. James was thankful for the warming sun, knowing that the paralyzing cold would soon be upon them. The dull brown landscape was dotted

with plowed fields that had already yielded their autumn harvest of wheat, millet, and a coarse grain called *gaoliang*, used mostly for animal feed. Each year the land offered its promise of food for another year, but in China that pledge was often annulled by drought, flood, insects, or the pillaging armies of warlords.

The North China Plain lay flat and treeless over an area of eight thousand square miles, south of Peking and north of the Yellow River. Densely populated and heavily cultivated, the land supplied nearly everything needed by the people, from cotton for their clothing to mud bricks for their homes. In the section of the plain comprising what the London Missionary Society called its rural or “country fields” of Tsangchow and Siaochang, there were more than ten thousand villages with a total population of over ten million.

James scanned the flat landscape looking in vain for a tree or hill. How the cart drivers found their way was still a mystery to him. There were no roads, no landmarks, and each village they passed looked exactly like the one before. As the morning wore on, his mind ranged back over all that had happened to bring him to this day.

When he first volunteered for service with the LMS, the Rev. James D. Liddell had said: “I would gladly undertake the duties pertaining to a real pioneer situation.” The society had obliged by posting him to Ch’ao Yang in Mongolia, two hundred fifty miles northeast of Peking. He had left his fiancée, Mary Reddin, in Scotland, knowing that he must prove himself on the field for a year and pass a Chinese language examination before she would be allowed to join him. James arrived in China on November 10, 1898, and a month later wrote the LMS Foreign Secretary in London, saying that he had already begun studying the language and was planning to take his exam the next May. He continued: “I expect that when you receive a wire saying I have passed, Miss Reddin will be sent to me.”

During the first year he referred himself as “a poor show” in terms of effectiveness, but quite the opposite was true. Within six months he was visiting outlying villages to preach and meet with

Chinese Christians. Whatever James Liddell lacked in genius, he made up for in tenacity. Ever hungry to learn more of the country and its people, he traveled to the northernmost LMS station at Pei Tzu Fu, even after being warned that the road was infested with robbers.

His missionary colleague at Ch'ao Yang, Dr. Thomas Cochrane, had grown pessimistic about the LMS effort in Mongolia and felt the station should be abandoned and left to the Irish Presbyterians. "We should concentrate our efforts on people willing to listen," Cochrane argued, "on those who are anxious to hear the gospel." Although James was far from ready to accept that evaluation, in July, he and Cochrane were forced to leave Ch'ao Yang for several months when bandits threatened to take over the city.

This was an age of near anarchy in China when armed bands of marauders vied with warlords for control of towns and villages. Outlaws routinely kidnapped Chinese men believed to have wealth, then sent the family a severed eyelid or ear along with a note demanding money. If the ransom was not quickly paid, additional notes and body parts continued to arrive as the victim suffered a hideous torture. When the bandits lost patience, they often coated the victim with oil and set him afire in a public place as a warning to others. Women were often taken, and, according to one missionary, "the refinements of cruelty practiced upon the poor women dare not be mentioned."

Mary Reddin likely knew none of this when she sailed for China on September 11, 1899. She did know that James had passed his language exam, that she loved him and after six years of engagement, she was eager to become his wife. Whatever was ahead, they would face it together. Six weeks later she stepped off the ship in Shanghai and into James' arms. Her head was still swimming with the new sights and sounds when they were married at the Shanghai Cathedral on October 23. They left the next day to return to James' station at Ch'ao Yang in Mongolia.

In May 1900, letters arrived from Tientsin warning of serious trouble there and threats from a militant group known as The Soci-

ety of Righteous and Harmonious Fists. Members of the group, called Boxers by Westerners, were determined to eliminate all foreign influence in China. In Ch'ao Yang, growing numbers of Boxers began to drill openly, reciting phrases they believed made them invulnerable to swords, knives and bullets.

After several months of very encouraging work, James sensed a marked change in the mood of the people toward the missionaries and their local converts. As James walked with several Chinese Christians to chapel one Sunday in early June, a group of Boxers began to shove and threaten the Chinese believers. Within days the situation became critical, forcing James and Dr. Cochrane to pack a few things and seek sympathetic Chinese friends to help them leave Ch'ao Yang. Cochrane's wife and children traveled in a cart while Mary, seven months pregnant, was carried in a sedan chair by six local Christians who risked death to help them. The Cochranes and Liddells made their way to a coastal city where they found passage on a boat to Shanghai.

Even as they departed, the threats turned to violence as the Boxers began a reign of terror across North China. They murdered some two hundred foreign missionaries, teachers and businessmen, but took greater vengeance on Chinese Christians and their families. Thousands fell to the sword. The Boxers also burned houses, schools and churches—anything that symbolized foreign domination and power. For two months they laid siege to the cities of Tientsin and Peking until an international military force from eight nations ended the uprising. Tragically, the foreign armies' rampaging sack of Peking planted the seeds of future rebellion.

In the relative safety of the London Missionary Compound in Shanghai, Mary gave birth to Robert Victor Liddell on August 27, 1900. The joy of his safe arrival was tempered by the peril of Chinese friends left behind. James wrote: "I commend the scattered flock to the Great Shepherd of the sheep, praying and believing that He will care and provide for them in this their time of need." Although the Boxers were put down and the Chinese government was forced to pay for damaged property, many people believed it was

just a matter of time before the next anti-foreign movement swept China.

In November, the Liddells moved from Shanghai to Tientsin, a bustling port city and center of commerce eighty miles south of Peking. There they awaited further assignment from the LMS. But during this period of transition, James was not idle.

Early in 1901, as many of the Chinese Christians began creeping back to their villages, James was given the task of helping them receive government compensation for their houses and churches destroyed by the Boxers. In what would become a life-long pattern in China, James left Mary safe in Tientsin while he traveled to Mongolia. Unsettled conditions in the wake of the Boxer Uprising made communication impossible, and for weeks Mary had no idea whether her husband was drinking tea with friends or in the hands of bandits. After prolonged delays in Chin Chou, James returned to Tientsin and on a second attempt finally reached Ch'ao Yang in July. For two months he assisted the remnant of Chinese believers there before returning home to Mary and baby Rob.

The Liddell's second son was born in Tientsin on January 16, 1902. James and Mary named him Henry Eric, and that is how it appeared in the LMS magazine, *The Chronicle*, in London. A few weeks later, as James walked to the British Municipal Building in Tientsin to register the birth, Dr. Ernest Peill, a missionary colleague asked, "Well, Liddell, what did you name the wee chap?" When James told him "Henry Eric," Peill said, "H.E.L. With those initials he'll have a hard time at school." James immediately returned home to confer with Mary, and the name was changed to Eric Henry.

Six weeks after Eric's birth, James again left Tientsin, this time in a blinding snowstorm, for a final return to Ch'ao Yang. After a three-day journey by train to Chin Chou, he met two men from the Irish Presbyterian Mission. From there, with a Chinese escort of twelve mounted men, they made their way into territory where lawlessness and anarchy still reigned. In spite of a journey that James

called “both difficult and dangerous,” he successfully oversaw the transfer of the LMS property to the Presbyterians.

Now, as he journeyed with his family to Siochang late in 1902, it seemed impossible that all this had happened in the four years since James arrived in China. “More like four lifetimes,” he thought to himself. Covering his face with a cloth to block out the choking dust, he perched on the shaft between cart and mules for a respite from walking. A cry from hungry Eric caused James to glance at the sun as it settled toward the horizon.

“Not much farther to the inn,” he told Mary. She was a brave lady, this Mary Reddin, he thought to himself. The physical examination required of all prospective missionary wives had listed her as 5 feet, 3 inches and 8 stone (112 pounds). Regarding her general condition and powers of endurance, the doctor stated simply: “She is healthy and well developed but not robust.” And if ever there was a country where strength and vigor were required, it was China.

The next afternoon as their carts rolled through the gates of the LMS compound at Siochang, James pointed toward a completed three-story house standing between two other partially built structures of identical shape and size. “That’s your new home,” he said with a smile. Mary hardly had time to take it in before they were surrounded by a welcoming committee of missionaries and smiling Chinese. James set Rob on the ground, handed Eric to a lady standing nearby and helped Mary down from the cart. When her feet hit the ground, she watched in disbelief as the dust fell in clumps from her clothes.

In the rural area where James would be working, eighty churches had been destroyed and hundreds of Chinese Christians killed during the Boxer Uprising. In addition, the entire LMS compound at Siochang had been destroyed. Missionary homes, medical dispensary, schools and a five hundred seat church were reduced to small piles of rubble. For the past few months James, along with Dr. Sewell McFarlane, had helped supervise the rebuilding as they started from scratch.

On December 6, 1902, J. D. Liddell wrote to George Cousins at LMS headquarters in London: “We, i.e., Mrs. Liddell and family are now all at Hsiao Chang. The house we are living in is finished until the Spring, when various little matters will require attention.

“One other house is nearing completion and the third will be ready about the end of March 1903.

“The superintending of the work was not easy, as constant watch had to be kept lest the many ‘raw’ workmen made mistakes.

“Dr. McFarlane and I think the houses are a credit to the Society, and ought to stand the wear and tear of many years.”

At Siaochang the Liddells occupied one of three large Western-style family homes within the mud-walled compound. A fourth smaller house accommodated the single ladies. Mary’s Chinese servants shopped for food, cooked, washed clothes and cleaned house while Chi Nai Nai, the “amah,” looked after the children. As a trained nurse, Mary hoped she could assist medically at the mission or become involved in the educational work with the women. For a time she did, but her frail constitution and the demands of a growing family left Mary tired or feeling ill much of the time.

In October 1903, she gave birth to Janet Lillian, always called Jenny. Three days after the birth, Mary developed peritonitis. The missionary ladies at Siaochang attended her day and night while Dr. Ernest Peill applied all his knowledge, but she did not respond. One evening as she lay near death, Dr. Peill said to James: “There’s nothing more I can do.” The two men slipped from their chairs onto their knees and poured out their hearts in prayer for Mary. The next day she rallied and began a slow recovery.

In one of his annual reports, James wrote to the Foreign Secretary of the LMS: “Will you excuse me saying just a little—for your own ears—concerning my wife? She has struggled with this language amidst all that tends to hinder and discourage. She has tried to do what lay to her hand. But household duties and homeland sorrows¹ have taken a lot out of her. In her own quiet way she does far more

1. Mary’s mother died in 1903.

than many would give her credit for. And if willingness to do much counts for anything, then she has done nobly.”

As the children grew, Chi Nai Nai followed Rob, Eric, and Jenny around the compound at Siaochang. For a time, their wanderings were confined to the ground floor verandah on three sides of the house. Then it was down the steps with tentative forays toward the large stone church, the medical dispensary and the school for Chinese boys and girls. At first it was easy for Chi Nai Nai to keep up with them, but as their mobility increased, so did her frustration. On her tiny bound feet, she could not possibly run and catch them. Rob six, Eric four, and Jenny two ran off in three directions with Chi Nai Nai shouting after them: “Lobbie! Yellie! Jei-nee!” Dutifully, they would return because they loved her, just as she loved them.

During family prayers each evening, Eric was famous for going into fits of giggling, for which he would have to be sent from the room. But he was also a shy, sensitive child who often requested that they sing “The Ninety and Nine.” When they reached the part about the little lamb, lost and alone on the mountainside, he always cried. He grew up learning that they belonged to God, but also to the LMS. Once as little Eric hammered nails into the verandah, Mary told him he mustn’t do it because the house belonged to the mission. In frustration he laid down his hammer and asked, “Are we the mission’s too?”

James spent much of his time visiting the surrounding villages, preaching in public on market days and meeting with local congregations of Chinese Christians to encourage them and their pastors. He thrived on the work, in spite of the exhausting travel on the North China Plain. In the spring, he battled the choking dust storms that swept down from the Gobi Desert. The long rains of autumn turned the rutted cart paths into a sea of trembling mud, two feet deep. Winter brought blowing snow and mind-numbing cold of minus ten degrees Fahrenheit. But weather rarely stopped James, and he was never sick.

The only thing that could defeat him was the heat. Summer on the North China Plain brought endless days of strength-sapping

temperatures over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The houses that kept the missionaries warm in the winter became ovens under the cloudless skies and the blazing sun. At night, with no fans to move the air, parents and children slept fitfully in ever-widening pools of perspiration. Prickly heat plagued the little ones while adults struggled to maintain some level of productivity. Their only relief was the annual pilgrimage to Peitaiho.

From Siaochang, it was a grueling four-day journey to the seaside cottages on the Gulf of Pei Chihli, 200 miles east of Peking. But once there, the women and children often stayed all summer, with the husbands joining them for the month of August. Some critics considered the annual holiday a luxury, but the missionaries saw it as a necessary time of recovery and recuperation. Accommodation at P.T.H., as it was affectionately known, ranged from the modest bungalows owned by various mission organizations to the opulent summer houses of business executives—the “taipans” of the Kailan Mining Administration, Butterfield and Swire, British-American Tobacco, and other international companies. Westerners roamed freely and safely along the beaches and through the village, attending tennis parties, concerts and sing-alongs. Evening gatherings ranged from cocktail parties for the business crowd to missionary Bible conferences with such noted speakers as Dr. F. B. Meyer of London. It was always a sad autumn day when the cottages were boarded up and the last missionaries returned to their places of service.

As James Liddell continued to visit the villages around Siaochang, he developed a growing conviction that the future of Christianity in China did not lie with him. In his report for 1904, he noted that he spent so much time traveling by very slow and exhausting means, he usually wasn't worth much at the end of the day. The best work, he believed, would be done by the local pastors who lived in the villages. Eventually, he would leave, but they would stay. His goal must be to train and encourage them. In circular letters to friends, and in his official reports to the London Missionary Society, James

was careful to mention his Chinese colleagues by name and commend them for their faithful service to Christ.

“I cannot close this short review” he wrote in 1903, “without saying a few words of praise regarding three of our leading men, namely Chang Sung Mao, Pao Feng Ko and Ts’ui Chang Tu’ei. These men have been a source of strength and help throughout the year. We have other preachers doing noble work, but these three stand head and shoulders above the others.”

During these years, Rob and Eric regarded everything that happened at Siaochang as an adventure. When torrential summer rains turned the LMS compound into an island, they splashed happily in the pools of water. An autumn plague of grub-like insects that destroyed eighty percent of the local crops became a contest to see who could pick the largest number off the garden plants and put them in a tin. While others were repulsed by the marauding vermin, the little boys stood near the compound gate and listened to what sounded like horses munching outside as the horde devoured almost all of the grain standing in the fields. A January blizzard that blocked all roads for two weeks became an occasion to bundle up in their padded coats and trousers for a romp through the snow.

They did not feel the isolation of their remote station, although it could be very trying for the adults. After the boys said a polite good-bye to Dr. and Mrs. Ernest Peill, who were departing for a new assignment at Peking, they could not understand why their mother wept for so long over the loss of these friends. Like most missionary children, they inhabited a safe, tranquil world, free of the burdens born by their parents, and removed from the sorrows of the Chinese people outside the compound walls.

In March 1907, Rob and Eric watched with wondering excitement as the servants packed the trunks with clothing and a few household goods. James and Mary kept talking of going “home” for a visit. Since Siaochang was the only home Rob and Eric had ever known, they could not picture what lay ahead. Mary was thrilled by the prospect of returning to Scotland for the first time in nearly eight years.

But no matter how hard she tried, she could not remove one dark cloud from the bright horizon of their furlough. When the homeland time was over and they returned to China, she knew that she must leave her little boys behind.