

AMY CARMICHAEL

When Chris first asked me who I'd like to speak about as an inspiring Christian, my immediate reply was 'Amy Carmichael'. I wondered why I'd chosen her out of all the possibilities. However, once I got down to reading her writings again and biography I experienced again the person of Amy Carmichael and her complete dedication to God and His plan for her life.

Amy was born in 1867 into a Presbyterian family in Ireland. She was the eldest of 7 children. She seems to have had a happy childhood. She was called 'Wild Irish' because of her zest for life and her zany sense of humour. There was the time squeaks interrupted family prayers. Amy pretended to know nothing but the truth came out. The frozen mouse in her pocket had revived.

Even as a young person she had a real concern for others. When still in her teens she founded a group for mill girls who worked in that area of Belfast.

For years Amy wanted to be a missionary. She prayed about it and wrote down reasons why she thought God couldn't want it.

It was in 1887 that she went to the Keswick Convention, a Christian conference. There she heard Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary to China speak and appeal for missionaries to go to China. She felt that God was calling her to go. Her father by this time had died at the age of 54 so she was worried about her Mum. When she went to speak to her Mum about being a missionary, she said God had already spoken to her about it and that she must let Amy go. She enlisted and trained in London but then was rejected because she was considered too frail. She did not give up but went and joined CMS - the Church Missionary Society. She first went to Japan, then Sri Lanka and then India.

In India she formed the Dohnavur Fellowship and especially worked with girls who were forced into prostitution in the Hindu temples. Like Hudson Taylor in China, the Dohnavur missionaries wore native dress and followed native customs as much as possible. Amy dyed her skin with dark coffee. At the age of 3 Amy had prayed that God would change the colour of her eyes, from brown to blue, her favourite colour but it was much more important that Amy had brown eyes. With her native dress, dyed skin and brown eyes she was able to get into the temple to find out about the temple children

which she never would have been able to do as a foreign -looking woman.

It was a custom in India for young girls to be taken to the temple- perhaps because a widowed mother or deserted wife needed the money, or because the child was abandoned or because the child was given as a gift to God in return for some favour from God. There they were taught to sing and dance and then by the age of 9 or 10 they'd be 'married' to one of the deities and spend their lives entertaining the men who came to the temple. If a child attempted to escape she would be branded on both hands. This practice was legal until 1988-not so long ago. By 1913 the Dohnavur fellowship had 130 girls under its protection and Amy was known as Amma- mother. Her interference in Hindu customs brought angry opposition from villages and she faced kidnapping charges on several occasions. She also got into trouble with Muslims as different individuals converted to Christ.

Amy spent 55 years in India. She never came back to England for a break or holiday and is buried there. After a fall in 1931 she was confined to her bed most of the time and after another fall in 1948 she was immobilised. She spent 20 years in her room. What did she do in that time? She wrote letters and notes of appreciation, greetings for birthdays, to missionaries on furlough or whenever she heard someone needed some special encouragement. She also wrote 13 new books in that period. Often there were queues of people wanting to visit her. Tellingly her room was called the Room of Peace.

But you may ask what does this mean for us? Is it enough just to learn about Amy and what an incredible life she lived for God? What does her life have to say to us?

- She went all out for God- wherever she was and in whatever she was doing. There were no half measures for her. She certainly lived life to the full- whether it was with the mill girls or rescuing and looking after these young Temple girls in India. One of her sayings was 'There is always something to be happy about if you look for it: 2 men looked through prison bars, the one saw mud, the other stars.' She always looked up towards the stars and what could be done for God.
- Illness and frailty didn't stop her. Even when she was confined to bed, she thought of others- writing to them, praying for them. And people wanted to visit her! She doesn't appear to have given off a sick room

feeling even though more often than not she was in terrible pain.

- For her, loving was the most important thing- not in a soppy or romantic way. First was her love for God for whom she did everything and then her love for others. One of her better known sayings 'You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving' and that's what she did.

All of this wasn't because Amy was a great person in herself but because she had faith in a great God.