

Gladys Aylward: The Little Woman Study Guide

Gladys Aylward: The Little Woman by Gladys Aylward

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Plot Summary

GLADYS AYLWARD: THE LITTLE WOMAN is an autobiographical account of an English-maid-turned missionary, who spends much of her life in rural China, preaching the gospel and affecting people's lives through the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Starting from humble beginnings as an English maid wanting to be a stage actress, Gladys finds God during a chance visit to a prayer meeting. From then on, she is convinced by reading the Bible, especially the story of Nehemiah who traveled a long distance to tend to the suffering in Jerusalem, that God means for her to conduct missionary work in China.

After a harrowing train trip during which she survives the war front and an attempt to force her into slavery in a work camp, she arrives at a destitute town called Yangcheng and the dilapidated home of an elderly missionary, Mrs. Lawson. The two women transform the home into an inn for passing mule shepherds, which Gladys continues to run after the death of Lawson a year later. For the next several years, Gladys preaches the gospel to passing shepherds, and she also goes town to town to end the cruel Chinese custom of foot-binding. During this time she accumulates dozens of orphan children for whom she cares.

The Chinese-Japanese war erupts, and for a time Gladys cares for wounded soldiers as well. But one day her very town and inn are blown apart by Japanese bombing, and she must flee to the mountains with her children. Amid war, Gladys eventually becomes a spy of sorts, telling the local Chinese general of the movements of the Japanese, for as a missionary she is allowed to go freely from town to town.

With Japanese occupation looming, Gladys must embark on a taxing 12-day trip through the mountains with her children in an effort to get to an orphanage in Free China. She barely survives the journey, not losing a child but coming down herself with pneumonia and typhus.

Gladys next witnesses the horrors of the incoming Communist government, and she relates of witnessing the beheading of two-hundred students who refuse to renounce Jesus Christ to become loyal to Communism.

Persecuted in China, she settles back in England, helping the Chinese there to form a church; eventually she heads to America to raise funds for an orphanage and other charitable institutions in China, traveling to an unknown land just as she had as a young woman.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: Gladys Aylward had always wanted to act on stage as a child. She attended Sunday school but always this desire to act burned in her. She became a parlormaid, with the intent on learning drama on the side to pursue a career on stage.

However, one night for a reason she can't explain, Gladys attends a religious meeting and there realizes that God has a claim on her and that Jesus Christ is her savior. She joins the Young Life Campaign and reads an article about China. She finds it "a staggering thought" that so many people in China have never even heard of Jesus Christ. Eventually, it becomes Gladys' sole desire to travel to China and do missionary work there.

The way there is not easy. A missionary society rejects her request to go to China, taking her for a simple girl who could never learn Chinese. She does some housekeeping for a couple of retired missionaries, Dr. and Mrs. Fisher, who make a lasting impression on Gladys with their deep and implicit faith in God.

Readings of the Bible, of the stories of Abraham, Moses, and especially of Nehemiah, show Gladys that people can travel to far away countries on God's command. After reading Nehemiah (in who Gladys saw a lot of herself), God speaks to Gladys and urges her to follow Nehemiah's lead.

She then works day and night as a parlormaid to earn money for a fare for China. She keeps a savings at the railway station towards a fare of about 47 pounds. In less than a year she earns enough to pay the fare.

She decides she will travel to Tientsin in China, as she heard of an elder missionary woman, Mrs. Lawson, who was in that city and who was hoping for a young woman to continue her legacy. She receives small gifts like a fur coat and a second-hand suitcase from her parents or maid friends and with no money and very meager possessions begins the trip to China.

Chapter 2: Gladys leaves London via rail. She has a friendly encounter with an Englishwoman who is moved by Gladys' faith. This woman gives Gladys a British pound as a gift. Gladys spends a night in Berlin with a young woman who knows a little English, and then the woman is off to Russia. By this time, no one on the train speaks English, and she feels alone and afraid.

Deep in Russia, the train conductor comes to her compartment and tries to urgently tell her something, but the language barrier is near impossible to overcome. All she can understand from a Russian traveler who speaks a little English is that the Russians and Japanese are fighting, and that this fighting may prevent any entry into Manchuria.



Later, she looks out the window and sees all the Russian soldiers on the train exit into the forest. Moving about the train, she discovers the train is completely abandoned.

Gladys hears gunshots and exits the train. She stumbles around for several miles before encountering the train's crew. Through gestures, they communicate that the train is under attack, and she needs to go back to the last town; the train can go no further. She trudges back, sleeping on her suitcase for a few hours, eventually returning to a town called Chita. There, she is arrested and interrogated for vagrancy, as she is exhausted and dirty, but has no place else to go. Held in a filthy cell for a night, she finds a note in her bible stating "Be ye not afraid of them - I am your God," which Gladys takes as a comforting sign.

Eventually the Chita officials put her on another train, and she passes through another couple of towns before the way is again blocked due to Japanese attacks. Luckily, she finds someone knowledgeable who speaks English, who tells her she needs to go to the town of Vladivostok in order to get through to China.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3: Gladys arrives in Vladivostok, eventually finding a Russian claiming to be a tourism official who knows some English. He takes her passport and shows her around town. Gladys gets nervous about the man, who doesn't seem to want to return her passport. It is revealed that the man wishes to force her to remain in the town and work there as a machinist. This "tourism official" in fact alters her passport, changing her occupation from "missionary" to "machinist."

A young woman sees Gladys' plight and urges Gladys to trust her and follow an old man from her hotel, who will see Gladys to safety. After fending off the sexual advances of the tourism official, Gladys decides she has no other option. Gladys follows this old man to the pier, who leaves her in the hands of a Japanese captain. There, Gladys is captured by Russian soldiers and is about to be hauled back to town, but she manages to bribe the soldiers with the British pound given to her by the Englishwoman on the train, just long enough to be able to board the Japanese ship.

The ship arrives in Japan, and Gladys is taken to the British consulate, where she is scolded by the consulate official for her recklessness. Nevertheless, she is cleaned up and given passage to Kobe, Japan. There she rooms for a couple days with a missionary society before getting a ticket for Tientsin, China.

By mid-November, Gladys finally sets foot in China, where she celebrates Thanksgiving with a missionary group. She goes in search of the old missionary, Mrs. Lawson, who has sent a Mr. Lu to Tientsin. Over the course of a couple days and a few bumpy rides on Chinese backroads, Mr. Lu takes Gladys to a little place called Yangcheng outside of Tientsin, the home of Mrs. Lawson.

Mrs. Lawson greets Gladys kindly but without any emotion, as is her way. Lawson lives in a poorly-kept but large home. She pays very low rent on the place because the locals feel the home is haunted. Lawson tells Gladys to sleep anywhere she wants, and to not undress for bed, as her possessions are less likely to be stolen that way. So much for hospitality.

Chapter 4: Mrs. Lawson lets it be known that her intention is to turn their home into an inn for muleteers (mule shepherds) passing by. They transform the home into an inn and hire a cook. It becomes Gladys' job to literally grab lead mules from the mule trail and steer them into the inn, so their masters might see the inn and decide to stay there.

This goes on for several months. Gladys learns the Chinese of the rough and rowdy peasant muleteers eventually well enough to tell a couple Bible stories. Gladys follows Mrs. Lawson as she preaches at the market and on street corners around the town. All



the Chinese are amazed at the presence of Europeans and their large feet; Chinese women at this time have their feet bound.

About a year passes, and Gladys is established in the inn. Mrs. Lawson dies from old age, telling Gladys that she must carry on the work they started. The death of Mrs. Lawson means the woman's modest source of private income ceases, and the inn becomes unprofitable. Gladys is left with a great deal of uncertainty upon Mrs. Lawson's death.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5: Gladys receives a visit from the mandarin (akin to a local governor). She is told to fear this man as he may cut her head off if she bows to him incorrectly, but, in fact, the mandarin asks Gladys for help. By government decree, foot-binding of females (a popular and ancient custom) has been outlawed, and the mandarin needs a female with unbound feet to help enforce this new law. The mandarin would like Gladys to travel the province with two soldiers, albeit on very little salary, inspecting feet and making sure foot-binding is not taking place. Gladys takes the job, finding it at first a funny gig but in retrospect an invaluable way to end a cruel custom and spread more of the gospel.

Gladys describes a typical visit to a village. The soldiers with her announce that foot-binding is illegal, and any father who binds his daughter's feet will go to prison. Gladys comforts the crowd by telling a funny story, perhaps a fairy tale, then she goes around to inspect feet. She urges teen girls to undo their bindings and get shoes that fit them, and she scolds fathers who insist on the old tradition. Naturally she also uses such occasions to tell bible stories and talk about Jesus Christ.

Some years pass in this manner. Small Christian congregations are beginning to appear in the small villages; foot-binding is ceasing as well as the taking of opium, and overall Gladys feels like a member of the Chinese. She is fluent with the language as well as several dialects. She applies for and is granted Chinese citizenship in 1936; her Chinese name is Ai-weh-deh, or "virtuous woman."

Chapter 6: Gladys complains of loneliness, and as has happened at certain points in her life, God seems to answer her. One day she comes upon a woman holding a child. The child is filthy, thin, and looks ill. Gladys tells the woman she should not have a child like that out in the blazing sun, and the woman replies it is none of Gladys' concern. Gladys realizes that the young child is not the woman's child, that in fact the baby was trafficked in the human trade somewhat common in China at the time. The woman offers to sell the baby to Gladys for increasingly lower amounts, but Gladys has no money and thinks the woman is despicable.

Eventually, fed up, Gladys turns her pockets out and discovers she has a total of nine pence. The woman takes the money and gives the baby to Gladys. Gladys appropriately names the baby Ninepence, who she takes home and raises. Eventually Gladys accumulates about twenty neglected children to care for at her inn, and she is no longer lonely.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7: Gladys arrives in a town with a bad reputation, and goes door to door to inspect daughters for foot-binding. At one home, she is met with resistance, and lied to by a woman named Mrs. Ching, who claims that no children live there. Finally, Mrs. Ching brings a 4-year-old girl to Gladys, who is in pain with bound feet. Gladys takes the bindings off and massages the girl's feet. Mrs. Ching is again pressed and reluctantly brings four other children forward, all foot-bound. Gladys eases these children's sufferings and names them. She learns that Mrs. Ching is a slave bought and paid for by her master, and the children are property also. Mrs. Ching fears the wrath of her master.

Gladys introduces Mrs. Ching to Jesus Christ, and tells her she no longer needs to live in fear. She takes the children and Mrs. Ching to her inn, where they are tended for. Mrs. Ching expects to be put in prison, but Gladys invites her to stay at her inn. Mrs. Ching enthusiastically embraces Jesus Christ, joining Gladys in her missionary work.

Chapter 8: Gladys speaks with the mandarin, a wise man who questions how Gladys would presume to bring civilization and religion to a region and people who had their own civilization and religion well before Gladys' people. Gladys points to the poverty and suffering throughout China as indicative that the region lacks the love of Jesus Christ, but the mandarin fails to see how China will every change, or how Christianity could ever make such an impact.

Gladys next speaks of her time during the Chinese-Japanese war. During this time she cared for many war-wounded in her inn, with her children helping tend to the injured soldiers. At this time she was also busy preparing for an annual convention in which Christians from around China would gather to her inn. She arranged for a very powerful guest speaker. The convention arrives but the guest speaker does not; Gladys later learns the man was held up by the Japanese. Gladys worries that there is no guest speaker to move the congregation.

This problem is solved when a soldier named Jonathan Wen arrives. Thinking him initially nothing special, Gladys is amazed to discover he is a Christian with powerful and eloquent oratorical skills. For the next week Wen delivers an impassioned sermon that impacts all those gathered.

One night during this convention, Gladys is awoken by loud noises and believes it to be enemy bombardment. To her delight, Gladys discovers it is actually the loud chanting of an impromptu service in her courtyard.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9: One morning Gladys wakes up to the sound of planes flying. During her morning service a bomb hits the mule inn, and she is knocked unconscious. After she comes to, she realizes much of the surrounding area has been bombed by the Japanese.

She moves to another missionary's home temporarily. Her city of Yangcheng is at the center of the conflict, and it switches hands between the Chinese and Japanese often. In her status as missionary, she still travels to villages all around the region, regardless of who currently owns the town, and the Japanese pay her no mind. Because of this ability, she eventually becomes a sort of spy for the local Chinese general, telling him whether or not the Japanese have occupied a town and other military information. She feels it is her duty to aid her adopted people in this way. This is around 1941, and only some time later does she learn that Europe is also in the middle of war.

The mandarin (local governor) comes to say goodbye to Gladys; he is moving to another province. However, before moving on he asks to be converted to Christianity, which touches Gladys deeply. Afterward, Gladys continues to tend to war wounded, regardless of whether they are Chinese or Japanese. The mule inn is rebuilt for this task. There, as is her custom, she continues to hold services and preach religion. To one particular group of women, she repeats the Christian dogma that "We are all sinners."

Some time later, Chinese soldiers barricade her door and act threateningly towards her. Gladys can't imagine why. Eventually a Chinese general (come to be known as Lao Dah) arrives and demands Gladys tell him who gave her information about the general. Gladys states she has no idea what he is talking about and she has never met him, but for days he continues to interrogate her about how she came to know him.

Eventually it comes out that Lao Dah got word that "he is a sinner," which he applied to himself after hearing Gladys' proclamation that "we are all sinners." Gladys, glad to straighten out the confusion, states that she got her information from Jesus Christ in the Bible. Lao Dah is shown this Bible and taught about Jesus. It is revealed he is no general in the war but the leader of bandits, and he wants to atone for his sins. Gladys assures him that Jesus will forgive him and care for him. Thoroughly changed, Lao Dah takes Gladys to address his men. He tells his group of bandits that he has become Christian, and that he longer wishes to lead them in theft and breaking of laws. Gladys leaves the group, with Lao Dah telling her he will come back to her once he is done.

However, he never comes back, and Gladys is sad. Some two years later, a beggar arrives on her doorstep she doesn't recognize. Fortunately, one of her assistants recognizes him as Lao Dah. Some of Lao Dah's mind is gone; all he can say is that he



belongs to Jesus and to Gladys. He is fed and cared for and eventually he becomes sane enough to tell his story. He is indeed Lao Dah. After that speech to his men, his wicked men kidnapped him and held him as they continued to commit crimes. For months he was beaten and tortured, but he would not give up his Christianity. Eventually he is freed, and he wanders the countryside begging, where he accumulated his ill health and mental illness. Lao Dah's life lasts one more year, and in that time he is very happy living as a Christian and helping Gladys with missionary work, where he becomes beloved by the village people.

Chapter 10: Gladys continues to take in orphan children, and eventually she has a hundred. The Chinese general she has befriended tells her of one Madame Chiang and her orphanage, which receives government money and could probably take in such a large number of children. Gladys writes to her, and Chiang agrees to take the children. It is decided that Gladys' long-time helper, Mr. Lu, will take a group of children to Madame Chiang; it is a long, hard journey of about two weeks.

Weeks turn into months, and Mr. Lu does not return. Meanwhile, the war is going Japan's way, and soon the general, his wife, and his soldiers beg Gladys to flee with the Chinese army. Gladys stubbornly refuses to abandon her work and mission, telling them "Christians do not retreat." In a last pleading, a soldier tells her that she is a wanted woman by the Japanese, and she shows her a wanted poster of herself to prove it. This changes her mind, and she looks to the Bible for advice. The first page she turns to involves a verse saying "flee, flee into the mountains," and so she decides to flee. Unfortunately the Japanese are already in the town, and she escapes only very narrowly, amid bullets. She survives unharmed and gets safely to a Chinese-occupied town.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11: Gladys rejoins her children, with the ultimate goal of getting to Madame Chiang's orphanage in a portion of the country still unoccupied by the Japanese, Free China. All the roads are closed, so Gladys is forced to take her hundred children through the mountains on poorly-maintained mule tracks. This journey takes twelve days. The children become very weary and some become sick. The older children must carry the younger children. All are hungry.

At last they come to the Yellow River, beyond which is Free China. However, everything is abandoned except for a couple military posts; apparently Japanese occupation is imminent. Gladys is distraught and feels like giving up, but one of her children reminds her of Moses parting the Red Sea. Why can't they do that to the Yellow River? Gladys' strength is renewed, to the point she actually believes they can cross the River. At this time, a military man approaches them, learns their story, and orders a boat for them. God has provided once more.

Beyond the boat, the children are fed by good neighbors and spirits are raised. They board a train for a few days, but at one point the train stops and everyone is ordered to leave; the train cannot go further because of the Japanese. Gladys begs for the train to move on but is denied. She must again take the children down a mountain path to board another train, this time joined by two soldiers.

They arrive at a railway station but are told the only train running is a coal train. The Japanese would shoot at a train that carried any passengers. In desperation, Gladys hides the children among the coal cars and orders them not to make a sound or else they would be shot when they passed through Japanese-held territory. Luckily, they make it through unharmed.

They arrive at Madame Chiang's city but are denied entry, with the gatekeeper stating there are already too many refugees in the city and not enough food. Fortunately Gladys is told about a branch of Chiang's orphanage in a nearby Buddhist temple. She takes the kids there, and they are cared for. By this time, Gladys has contracted typhus and her mind is in a haze. She refuses medical treatment and instead goes out to the countryside to preach in her foggy state. Her memory is hazy at this point.

The next thing she knows she is in a hospital because she has typhus and pneumonia. The doctor says her only hope is to be taken to a larger hospital for treatment. Several people help her get there via a cow cart. Gladys narrowly avoids death and her health improves. Eventually she is visited by her old partner Mr. Lu. Lu was detained by the Japanese and imprisoned for a time, which is why he did not come back to the mule inn.



Chapter 12: Gladys recalls an episode involving one of her older children, Chu En. They have lived at Madame Chiang's (Sien) for several years. Chu En approaches Gladys and tells her he must go back to Yangcheng. Gladys naturally says no, as that city is still in ruins and dangerous. But Chu En states that God spoke to him and told him to go there, just as He spoke to Gladys about China, so Gladys relents. She wants to get him new trousers and shoes, but he instead asks her to pray for a stethoscope, an almost unheard-of item to get in China at that time. But she does pray for it.

Some time later, she has tea with a refugee, who shows her a box left behind by a missionary like herself in the confusion of war. Gladys convinces the woman that she is related to her, like a cousin, and the woman allows her to open the box. Amid some papers and food gone bad are some medical tools, including a stethoscope. Gladys thanks God for this gift. She gives it to Chu En, and soon he departs for Yangcheng. Some time later, a visitor from Yang Cheng tells Gladys that Chu En took a leadership role in the devastated village, preaching the gospel and administering to the sick. He uses the stethoscope for both medical purposes, and to peer into people's souls for religious purposes.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13: Gladys continues to improve from her bout with typhus with the kind help of fellow Christians. She hands all her children over to a mission, so she can concentrate on preaching. A group of college students stay near one night, having been driven from someplace else by war, and she finds them huddled over a map of northwest China, taking turns putting pins in parts of it like it was Pin the Tail on the Donkey. They explain that wherever they put their pin, they are praying for that village or region and especially praying for someone to bring God there, as northwest China is a very rural, forgotten place. Gladys feels she has seen this for a reason, and she volunteers to visit this region.

With the help of a doctor, Dr. Huang, she goes deep into northwest China, until she is herself broken by desolation and exhaustion. Huang prays for them to find the people God meant them to find, and they sing. Their singing attracts a lama, and this lama brings them to a "lomasery," full of about five-hundred lamas, who care for them and feed them. They are brought to a banquet hall, where they explain the birth of Jesus and the nature of their Christian God. They retire, but throughout the night Gladys and Dr. Huang are bombarded by questions from the lamas about Jesus and the nature of his love.

Gladys is given audience to the head lama. He explains that a few years ago a missionary also came to the area. He gave them a paper with John 3:16 on it (which promises the love of God to believers), but the missionary disappeared before he could be further questioned. Since then the lomasery had been greatly curious about this concept of God's love, and they had faith someone else would come to explain it. Gladys in the end becomes grateful to God for the opportunity to preach to these men. She returns to Sien with the belief that many lamas had found God's love.

Chapter 14: After the lomasery, Gladys recounts another episode in which she preaches in a village with a prison in it, full of hardened thugs who have never heard of Jesus Christ. Though afraid, she feels it is her duty to preach to such men, so for weeks and months, every day the prisoners are lined up for Gladys, who tells them of God's love and stories from the Bible. At this time she also visits a Christian leper colony. The lepers pray for her and for the men in the prison, which strengthens Gladys.

The toughest inmate is a man called Mr. Shan, who yells curses and spits on Gladys when she tried to engage him in conversation. By this time, some months into her work at the prison, five men have converted to Christianity, but largely the prison population is still rotten and rude. One day as the prisoners pass by her (at a time when she is not allowed to talk to them), a voice tells her to talk to Mr. Shan. Driven by this voice, Gladys touches the man on the shoulder through the bars and asks him if he isn't miserable. He again curses at her and asks what business of hers is his misery.



Gladys is mortified, especially because she touched the man. A Chinese woman should never touch a man in public, as this appears scandalous. However, her act bears fruit when later Mr. Shan interprets the gesture as love, specifically God's love and converts to Christianity. After Shan, many men also convert, and the prison changes in a profound and positive way.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 15: The war is over, and Gladys has taken a position at a church to receive war refugees. In this filthy and unkempt church she receives a visit from the Lord, not only a voice but a body. He instructs her he will come back to this church in 40 days to bless it. This gives Gladys forty days to clean it up. Eventually she has several people helping her, and by the 40 days the church is spotless and something of which to be proud. They have a gospel campaign, and to Gladys' joy it seems hundreds of people are converting to Christianity.

Unfortunately, this is a sort of calm before the storm. Communism enters the village in the form of hard-line government officials. They make everyone take a long questionnaire, evaluating their loyalty to the government. Anyone who does not swear loyalty to the government and communism are ridiculed and indoctrinated. However, a second test reveals that even more citizens are anti-government than the first test.

The Communists lay the blame for this on Christianity, especially in the local university, and they target a group of Chinese students who are active preachers. The Communists break up their meetings, and otherwise harass them, but the students only meet at another time, steadfast in their faith.

Finally, the entire town gathers in the central square, and Communists asks the students one by one to renounce Christianity. Not one of the approximately 500 students do so. That very day they are beheaded, and not even with the threat of this horrible death do they renounce Jesus Christ. As for why God would allow such barbarism, Gladys believes the students were sent to Him as quickly as possible before even worse things would have happened to them.

Chapter 16: With Communism increasing, Gladys has an increasing sense she should go back to England. At a prayer meeting a young man declares to the congregation that England needs salvation, and afterward Gladys pulls the man aside and asks him why. The man gives her a newspaper from England, and there is not one mention of God, only articles about film stars or sports. She realizes England, in its prosperity, has lost its way spiritually, and that she must go back to battle this "spiritual lethargy." After a year of waiting, she is essentially smuggled out of the country by a Christian group, as Communists are placing increasing restrictions on immigration.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17: Gladys returns to England and finds it a fairly Godless place in spite of the many chapels and churches everywhere. She feels people are using church as a social event rather than the focus being on God. She continues to travel at the request of this or that church, to tell her story of China and the work done there. She also tends to Chinese living in England, eventually forming a little Chinese Church.

One day she goes to Belfast, Ireland and is told of a Chinese woman kept in the insane asylum there. Once again, a voice tells her that this woman is the reason for her visit to the city. She finds a weepy, sick, thin woman named Wong Kwai at the asylum. Gladys learns after much prodding that Wong Kwai came to Ireland to care for the children of an Irish couple. She lived with the grandmother of the couple, however, who hated foreigners and who eventually claimed that Wong Kwai was a lunatic who attacked her. Wong Kwai, unable to speak any English, was locked up.

Gladys signs for Wong Kwai and gets her out of the asylum, and they live together for several months. Eventually Wong Kwai takes Jesus into her heart and becomes somewhat of a preacher herself. At Christmastime, though Gladys' means (and food) are very little, Wong Kwai invites many people to their home, and others happen to come by chance, until there are almost 30 people there. Though there is not much food, the gathering is nonetheless joyous.

Chapter 18: Still in Britain, Gladys thinks of how little clothing many in China have, and so she starts various clothing drives in the places around England she visits. She accumulates a great many hand-me-down clothes, which she distributes either through parishioners who are going to visit Asia, or through various organizations and orphanages. One of these parishioners tells her about Macao, and about the great many refugees from China there, so she gives him a bundle of her clothes to take to Macao.

The man later relates that he met a Chinese man in Macao, very much homeless and down on his luck, who used to be a great and wealthy man in China. The man had been praying for the dignity of decent clothing, so he might find a job and right himself, and so the parishioner gives the man the bundle of clothing. In it happens to be a complete suit, perfect for the man to find a job. Very rarely was Gladys donated a full suit, and thus she considers the suit falling into this particular man's hands another act of God. The man later reports he finds a job, has converted to Christianity, and is working to earn enough money to pay his family's way to Macao.

Gladys next feels a pull back to China and spends several more years in Hong Kong and Tai-peh, where she is greeted warmly by some of her former children, who are now grown-ups and have families. By the end of the volume, Gladys is frustrated with the

lack of funding available for her work in China and feels that wealthy America may be the place where her work could be put to the most use. So, she packs up for America, traveling to an unknown land just as she had many years ago.



Characters

Gladys Aylward

Gladys Aylward starts the story as a maid who always wanted to be a stage actress. However, she happens to visit a prayer meeting, and from that time forward she realizes God has a claim on her and that she must serve Him. She is compelled toward the most unlikely of places - China - and with almost no belongings, money, or food, she travels to an unknown land.

Undoubtedly, Gladys has an amazing amount of courage, courage Gladys might say is God-given. This, combined with dogged persistence and an abiding faith that God will take care of her no matter what, allow her to step into extraordinary circumstances - war, famine, the wilderness, a prison, a leper colony. While she might suffer greatly, doubt herself, or forget her purpose (she admonishes herself in one instance for praying for food and shelter, when she should be praying to find someone to introduce God to), in these instances of suffering she is visited by God (directly or through signs).

Though she accumulates a remarkable amount of occupations - innkeeper, itinerant preacher, foot inspector, nurse for war wounded, surrogate mother of hundreds of children, spy, church builder, and finally fund-raiser - all of these accomplishments are subsumed by her work for God, and throughout it all Gladys never fails to forget her primary purpose, which is to share God's love.

Her self-sacrifice, indifference to material wealth, and altruism, along with the qualities described above, earn her the nickname "Ai-weh-deh," or "virtuous woman."

God

As God plays such a direct part in Gladys' life, it is wholly appropriate that he be included as a major character. Gladys' God is all-powerful and all-loving. He stakes a "claim" on Gladys, compelling her to do His bidding and spread His word. This, of course, does not seem to Gladys like servitude or slavery in any earthly sense, for by serving God, Gladys loves and is loved by God.

God is capable of performing miracles and rescuing Gladys in her times of greatest needs. In various instances he "parts" the Yellow River (by providing a boat), rescues Gladys from a slave labor camp, and otherwise visits her in times of direst need and greatest doubt. He appears directly once (what he looks like, or if He even exists in fleshly form, is something not discussed), when He instructs Gladys that she has 40 days to clean up a church before he revisits it. Otherwise, in a handful of instances He also speaks directly to Gladys, assuring her that He is the god of Abraham, Moses and Nehemiah (and thus a God capable of miracles), and that she has no need to fear under His protection.



In Gladys' perspective, every conversion to Christianity, every good tiding or positive change in character, is not attributable to her but to God. As she says when leaving the lamasery, she can introduce a person to God, but it is that only that person's own decision, along with God's benevolence, which can allow God's love into one's heart.

The degree to which God intervenes or is responsible for events in Gladys' life is largely speculative on the part of the reader. Gladys herself has no doubt that God is always with her and is compelling her to do great deeds.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah's story in the Bible is the key story for Gladys in deciding to go to China. Gladys sees much of herself in his character. Nehemiah hears of suffering in Jerusalem but cannot go there to help because of his boss (a king) and his job (cup-bearer to the king). Similarly, Gladys cannot go to China, which she perceives to be in need, because of her job as a maid. Nevertheless, through persistence and faith Nehemiah does go to Jerusalem, despite his ties to the king. And so Gladys feels she must also go.

Dr. and Mrs. Fisher

The Fishers are retired missionaries for who, Gladys worked prior to traveling to China. Their remarkable faith in God and encouragement were a great support for Gladys.

Mrs. Lawson

Mrs. Lawson is an elderly missionary who Gladys comes to stay with in Yangcheng outside of Tientsin. She is dour and dogmatic, a sharp contrast to young and enthusiastic Gladys, but they have a common purpose in God. Gladys and Mrs. Lawson start an inn for traveling mule shepherds (muleteers), to whom they tell Bible stories and preach the gospel. Lawson dies from old age about a year after Gladys arrives in China, leaving Gladys with an unprofitable inn and a lot of uncertainty.

Ninepence

Ninepence is a baby when Gladys rescues her from the human slave trade for the price of nine pence. She becomes one of Gladys' original children for whom Gladys comes to care.

Mrs. Ching

Mrs. Ching is a human slave who cares for four children who are also slaves of the same master. She binds the feet of the girls, per her master's orders. When Gladys



takes her away from this servitude and teaches her about the love of God, Mrs. Ching becomes an enthusiastic convert to Christianity and a completely changed person.

Jonathan Wen

Jonathan Wen is a Chinese Christian soldier with an amazing oratorical skill. When a convention planned by Gladys is missing its guest speaker, Jonathan steps up to mesmerize and move the gathered Christians with his sermons.

The Mandarin

The mandarin is the equivalent of a local mayor or governor who rules over Gladys' adopted home of Yangcheng. He is a skeptical, intelligent man who doubts the power of Christianity to change China, but eventually he converts to Christianity.

Mr. Lu

Mr. Lu is a devoted Christian missionary who first works with Mrs. Lawson. He becomes Gladys' "right-hand man" after Lawson dies. Like Gladys, he is wholly devoted to Christianity and is always ready to do without and to sacrifice.

Lao Dah

Lao Dah is the leader of a bandit group who accuses Gladys of spying on him. When during a service Gladys proclaims that "we are all sinners," Lao Dah takes it personally and thinks Gladys knows that he himself is a sinner. After the misunderstanding is cleared up, Lao Dah becomes curious about Christianity and eventually becomes a Christian, renouncing his bandit ways.

Chu En

Chu En is one of Gladys' many orphaned children. When he becomes old enough to go out into the world on his own, he insists that God has told him he must go to Yangcheng, even though it is a dangerous and devastated place. He only asks that Gladys prays for a stethoscope for him. He uses this stethoscope to administer to the people of Yangcheng, physically and spiritually.

Mr. Shan

Mr. Shan is a hardened criminal in a local Chinese prison, a murderer. Gladys preaches at the prison, and he responds by cursing and spitting at her. Only after Gladys directly appeals to him by touching his shoulder (something unheard of in Chinese custom)



does Mr. Shan eventually come around and become a Christian. After his conversion, the majority of the prison population follows suit.

Wong Kwai

Wong Kwai is a Chinese woman who came to Ireland as a housekeeper and nanny. She was wrongfully imprisoned as a lunatic via the accusations of a hateful woman. Gladys visits her in the insane asylum, learns her story, and frees her. Wong Kwai becomes a happy Christian, and is always ready to tell anyone and everyone about the love of Jesus Christ.



Objects/Places

London, England

Gladys Aylward was born and raised in London, England, and at the beginning of the narrative, she is working as a parlormaid there. Her family is located in London, and the city is a comfortable place for Gladys, making her exit from the city for China all the more courageous.

Liverpool Street Station

This is where Gladys says a final good-bye to her friends and family and boards a train headed ultimately to China. She leaves on the morning of October 15th, 1932.

Vladivostok

Gladys has a frightening experience in this town. An interpreter befriends her, but it turns out he only wishes to compel her into forced labor as a machinist. The town is filthy and primitive, and Gladys wants no part of it. She narrowly avoids Russian soldiers, joining the crew of a Japanese ship to escape the town.

Yangcheng

Yangcheng is the remote village that Gladys initially settles in upon her arrival to China. There she establishes the mule inn, along with elderly missionary Mrs. Lawson, to spread the gospel to peasant mule shepherds. The town eventually comes under attack and is bombed in the Chinese-Japanese war.

Foot-binding

Foot-binding is an ancient Chinese practice of binding the feet of infant and children females, which results in small and deformed feet. The smallness of the foot is said to be aesthetically pleasing. Women bound in this manner have a difficult and painful time walking. It becomes Gladys' job to go from village to village inspecting the feet of young girls for binding in order to end the practice.

Ai-weh-deh and The Storyteller

Ai-weh-deh means "virtuous woman" in Chinese, and it becomes Gladys' nickname among the Chinese peasants. When she becomes a citizen in 1936, this is her official



Chinese name. Gladys' other nickname is The Storyteller, for the reason that she often tells both fairy tales and bible tales when she travels the country inspecting feet.

The Mule Inn

The mule inn is what Gladys and Mrs. Lawson set up in Yangcheng, an inn for passing mule shepherds with the opportunity to preach the gospel and attempt to spread the word of Jesus Christ. Gladys eventually takes in many orphaned children as well as war wounded into the inn. The inn is destroyed by bombing in the Chinese-Japanese war but eventually rebuilt.

The Stethoscope

Chu En is one of Gladys' older children, who is compelled to go to Yangcheng, and who asks not for clothes or shoes but for a stethoscope. Gladys miraculously finds a stethoscope among the possessions of a missionary woman who left China. Chu En uses this stethoscope in Yangcheng to physically and spiritually administer aid to the townspeople.

The Lamasery

Gladys visits a lonely lamasery deep in rural northwest China, home to 500 lamas. The lamasery had been previously visited by a missionary who spoke of the love of God but who had disappeared after that. Since then, the lamas had become very intrigued by this idea and prayed for someone else to come to tell them more. Gladys thus answers their prayers with her visit and her preaching.

The Old Suit

Back in Britain, Gladys starts a clothing drive for the poor peasants of China and Chinese refugees who don't have many clothes. She gives a bundle of these clothes to a Christian visiting Macao, who encounters a Chinese refugee in bad need of a suit to regain his self-respect and find a job. The bundle happens to contain one of the very, very few complete suits ever donated to Gladys. The suit helps the refugee to get on the right track and find a job.



Themes

Suffering to Salvation

Gladys Aylward's relationship to God is by far the most important thing in her life. It is this relationship, based upon faith, that allows Gladys to continually leave friends, family, and acquaintances, in the woman's everlasting search for those ignorant of the Christian faith. Gladys states that God has a "claim" on her, and she is meant to serve him. Gladys' life is thus a purpose-driven life, though sometimes retrospection is needed to find that purpose.

Related to this, Gladys imbues her narrative with a sense of pathos, the sense that one must suffer and endure misery and pain in order to reveal character, grow, and emerge changed for the better at the end. Gladys' various episodes clearly demonstrate pathos. This "noble suffering" is common in hagiographies (biographies about the saints; this volume is not a hagiography according to this definition, but nonetheless is the account of a holy woman), and ultimately it relates to the story of Christ himself, the original martyr, made to suffer greatly, though the idea of pathos predates Christianity. Suffice to say, there is a repeated pattern in the narrative whereby Gladys suffers and is in danger. She may doubt herself, doubt her mission, or even doubt her faith. In these times of "direst need" as Gladys terms it, God never fails to present himself (either directly or through signs or omens) to restore Gladys faith. Gladys thus emerges with a deeper love/respect/appreciation for God and is thus a stronger character.

Determinism

Gladys' account is an interesting examination of human nature as related to the debate between free will and determinism. A crucial question that arises to the reader is: Is Gladys' life predetermined by God, or is she making her own decisions? The answer, as with many things, lies somewhere in between. For example, Gladys gets the idea to go to China based upon an article she read at a prayer meeting. From this desire, she makes every effort to get to China, but there are many obstacles in the way. A missionary society rejects her as "too simple" to learn Chinese and be an effective missionary; also blocking Gladys is her lack of money and obligations as a maid. She becomes distraught and begins to doubt the wisdom of her desire to go to China. At this time she reads the Bible, and the passages she reads (Abraham, Nehemiah) seem to speak to her situation directly. These men traveled to foreign lands despite the kinds of obstacles she faces herself. God finally speaks to her directly, assuring her that He is her God—the same God that Nehemiah had. This renews her determination, and she works day and night to earn enough train fare to leave the country.

Just this single instance reveals the complexities possible in exploring this question of determinism. Did Gladys herself attend the prayer meeting because of the willful attempt to fulfill a need within her? Or did God preordain this circumstance, all the way



down to Gladys, by no coincidence, reading an article on China. Did God create Gladys' obstacles so that she might suffer only to emerge as a stronger and more determined person? Was God's direct intervention the deciding factor for Gladys, or was it the manifestation of the desire she already had within her? And notice that, even directly, God simply says "Do what Nehemiah did, and go." He is not explicit about China; Gladys first interpreted Nehemiah's story for herself and came to her own conclusion based upon the bible story before God ever spoke. This struggle between free will and determinism is found in countless examples in the volume.

Preaching

Since Gladys' stated purpose in life is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to convert others to Christianity, of considerable interest is the methodology Gladys uses to achieve this. The first and most obvious is the existence of the text itself. By relating the events of her life, and how God has provided for her in times of need, she is preaching the gospel with the text itself. Gladys hopes to share God's love and get readers to explore Christianity further.

The reader also understands Gladys' methods by her decision of China as the place of her missionary work, a place where perhaps only the very few have even heard of Jesus Christ. She eventually finds the "heathen" and "ignorant" Chinese more receptive and easier to convert than the English people she returns to much later. There is thus an importance placed on the circumstances and status of the potential convert. Not only are the Chinese ignorant of Christ, they are poor, starving, technologically backwards, and (at Gladys' time) the victims of frequent warfare. As God visits Gladys during dire need, so is he most welcome during the most trying of times for converts.

This reality extends into the more practical, everyday techniques Gladys employs to spread the word of God. Lawson and Gladys begin their work by establishing a mule inn for peasant shepherds passing through town. She eventually houses orphans, war wounded, and war refugees. So while she administers to the sick, hungry, and needy, she is also able to administer to them spiritually, and as the reader sees over and over again, physical need or life emergencies provide a window for aid of a spiritual manner. Those at a proverbial crossroads at their life are most receptive to a significant life change, such as religion.



Style

Perspective

This is an autobiographical account of the travails of a missionary woman with an unquestioning belief in God and Jesus Christ. The purpose of the text, beyond relating a lifetime of extraordinary events, is to convince the reader of God's benevolence, love, and power. The very act of writing the autobiography is simply another part of Gladys' missionary work. That God is a real and active presence in Gladys' life is exemplified by His direct communication with her, communication unblemished by even the hint of skepticism or uncertainty on the part of the author. Due to Gladys' fervent faith, life events are always presented vis-a-vis the author's relationship with God, coloring most everything in the text. With any major decision, from Gladys' initial trip to China to her journey into northwest China to her decision to take her children through the mountains during the Chinese-Japanese war, Gladys make sure to demonstrate God's hand guiding her.

It is Gladys' belief that God's love leads to supreme happiness and the eternal salvation of the soul. This powerfully impacts her perspective of the Chinese, whom she views as heathen, backwards, and miserable. There is no sense of cultural relativism or moral equivalence; Gladys presents herself as having the clearly superior morality, religion, and values, though at points she may come to doubt her actions (before those actions being redeemed and validated by God's intervention).

Tone

The tone of Gladys Aylward could be described as friendly, accessible, and supremely confident. The courage and confidence and faith Gladys displays in her narrative are the same traits she brings to her authorial voice. For example, the extraordinary and miraculous circumstance of God having direct communication with her at several points in her life - not to mention God once appearing before her as if flesh - are treated completely matter-of-fact. Gladys does not seem to anticipate any skepticism on the part of her reader in these instances, nor does she feel the need to qualify such events in the manner of "I know this is a little far-fetched, but..." Gladys' faith is so keen and complete that such questions do not enter into the discourse.

The distance of years has given Gladys a somewhat objective perspective on otherwise exciting and dangerous events. This allows her to consider events in light of her relationship with God. For example, Gladys' terrible journey through Russia to China, where she is nearly sold into slavery at a labor camp among other dangers, becomes for Gladys tolerable when she receives a sign from God and believes he is protecting her from harm. Similarly, Gladys' anguish when she cannot cross the Yellow River with her hundred children is tempered when she becomes convinced that God, as he did



with Moses, will provide a path through the water. This cycle of suffering or doubt and subsequent relief from God is a constant pattern in the volume.

Structure

Gladys Aylward is divided into eighteen chapters. The book proceeds in chronological order, from the time Gladys is a young maid in London to the time when she was about to embark on missionary work in America, presumably the same time she wrote the book. Chapters are primarily episodic in nature, relating the story of a particular person (Lao Dah the general, for one example), an item (the stethoscope), or event (Gladys' journey to Free China with her one-hundred children during the Chinese-Japanese war). For the sake of proper resolution to some of these individual stories, chronology may be briefly broken; for example, when early on a missionary society committee rejects Gladys as "too simple to learn Chinese," Gladys is able to "fast-forward" to tell the reader that in fact she went on to learn perfect Chinese along with a number of dialects. Another example is the story of Chu En. In order to wrap up his particular story, at the end of the chapter, Gladys relates that, years later, she heard that Chu En was successfully preaching in Yangcheng.

The narrative happens to be cyclical in nature, nicely bookended by Gladys taking journeys to foreign lands. In the first chapter,, the land is China; in the last, she is headed for America.

Finally, the narrative is event-driven; Gladys is less interested in accounting for all her time than in relating the handful of powerful events, people, or episodes that impacted her life and would be interesting to a general reader. So while the text is written in roughly chronological order, exact dates or an accurate sense of the passage of time are difficult to glean from the text.



Quotes

"On the third day of my new, I was sitting on my bed reading my bible. I had now reached Nehemiah. I felt very sorry for him and understood why he wept and mourned when he heard about Jerusalem in its great need and could do nothing about it. He was a sort of butler and had to obey his employer just like I did, I thought. Then I turned to the second chapter. 'But he did go on,' I exclaimed aloud, and got up, a strange elation within me. 'He went in spite of everything!'

As if someone was in the room, a voice said clearly, 'Gladys Aylward, is Nehemiah's God your God?'

'Yes, of course!' I replied.

'Then do what Nehemiah did, and go.'

'But I am not Nehemiah.'

'No, but assuredly, I am his God.'

That settled everything for me. I believed these were my marching orders." (11-12)

"Many of my secret pockets had been searched and almost everything of value was taken from me, as well as my luggage; only my little pocket Bible was left. I took it out and held it up to the dusty little light to try to read it, but the light was too dim. However, as I held it up, out dropped a piece of paper - a leaf torn from a daily calendar. And because the print was large and black, I could read, 'Be ye not afraid of them - I am your God,' a verse from Nehemiah.

How that page got there, I don't know, but after all these years I still have it. To me it was a special message sent to me from God in my direst need. That was my promise; my God would be with me whatever happened. These people could not harm me unless God allowed it." (24-25)

"Yangcheng itself was beautiful - a little Chinese town set in a valley between high, bare mountains. It had a wall all around, many narrow winding streets, and numerous temples which must have been hundreds of years old. It was on the ancient mule track from Hopeh to Honan. There were no real roads in that part of China, only the muddy, uneven mule tracks, and every day long mule trains passed through, or at night stopped in the inns.

There were few trees in Yangcheng, and the mountains were brown and bare, but there was great beauty nevertheless. In winter there was deep snow and it was very cold. It was nearing the end of November when I arrived at Yangcheng - five and a half weeks after setting out from Liverpool Street Station, but how much I had seen! How much I had learned in those weeks! And above all, for how much I had to worship my God!" (38)

"But I soon found that the inn did not bring in enough to pay Mr. Lu, the cook, and keep me in food. We only needed a few pounds a year; but now that Mrs. Lawson's small private income had ceased, the standard rate we were allowed to charge for a night's



lodging was not enough.

Also, I was very lonely and my position was no easy one. I was only a young woman, and every night my inn was crowded with rough, peasant muleteers. Certainly I could speak their language now; in fact, it was the only kind of Chinese I could speak, for I had learned most of it when listening to them each night. I prayed anxiously, but the way seemed beset with difficulties; I wondered if God was telling me I had to move on from Yangcheng, though where I could go I had no idea." (42)

"As I look back, I am amazed at the way God opened up the opportunities for service. I had longed to go to China, but never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that God would overrule in such a way that I would be given entrance into every village home; have authority to banish a cruel, horrible custom; have government protection; and be paid to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ as I inspected feet!

Gradually there were ones and twos converted here and there and in each village a little group gathered - the beginning of a small church. So through the next years as the gospel was preached, the practice of foot-binding ceased, opium-taking was reduced, and a witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ was set up in many places." (47-48)

"Very early I was awakened by a strange noise. Thinking it was enemy bombardment, I picked up Bao Bao, the youngest child, and rousing the other children we rushed out to the front courtyard which was very large for it had once been three camel inns. Instead of an enemy plane, a wonderful, amazing sight met my eyes. Hundreds of men and women were praying - some kneeling, some standing. A power that I can only liken to that of Pentecost swept over that place. In a moment I, too, was on my knees, awed and full of great reverence. Beside me was a woman who, with tears running down her face, was pleading with God for her husband. Suddenly the dawn began to break and over the compound was a great 'Hallelujah Sam Mei Chu' (Praise the Lord)." (66)

"The life he had endured took its toll, however, and he became very ill. Some village women helped him, though by now his mind was very clouded. All he could remember was that he belonged to Jesus and Yangcheng. After fifteen months of wandering, he made his way to Yangcheng, and, instead of a bullying, cursing general, came into the same courtyard as a poor, battered, penniless beggar. This faith implanted that one night of struggle had been as a grain of mustard seed and had remained unmovable, though all else had gone from him.

As his health improved, his mind cleared once more; but the blustering bandit was gone. In the village the children adored him and hung around him. No one except Timothy and myself knew his true identity. To the Christians he was Lao Dah (Big Brother) and they truly loved him. The women gave him little delicacies they made, and the men brought him back ling tang (raw sugar) when they returned with their mules, and to them ling tang was very precious.

But Lao Dah never really grew strong again. His chest had been weakened by suffering and exposure, and a year after his return, he died. The Christians in the village mourned him with great sorrow - to them he had indeed become Lao Dah." (79)



"So the hours went by until the dawn broke. A girl of thirteen, called Sualan, stood beside me. 'Ai-weh-deh, do you remember when God called Moses that he took the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry land and every one of them got safely across?'

I nodded. Sualan smiled sweetly at me as she asked, 'Do you believe it?'

'Of course, I do!' I replied immediately. 'I would not teach you anything I did not believe.'

'Then why don't we go across?' she asked simply.

That shook me. 'But I am not Moses,' I gasped.

'Of course you are not, but Jehovah is still God!'

That was like a physical blow. All the years I had been preaching had I really believed that Moses did take the children of Israel through the Red Sea? Did I believe that the waters rolled back, and stood up on either side while they crossed dry-shod? I had staked my life on God's mighty power. Why did I doubt now?

I turned to Sualan. 'We will go across,' I said, and truly I believed it. Sualan called some of the older ones together and we knelt in prayer. Sualan prayed simply, 'Here we are, Lord, just waiting for You to open the Yellow River for us.'" (91-92)

"One after the other of those two hundred names were called out, and not one faltered, though they knew enough of their persecutors by now to know that they would be made to suffer.

Every one of them was beheaded that very day in the marketplace. Before each execution the victim was given one last chance to recant; but even those at the end, who had been forced to watch the terrible butchery of all the others, did not flinch. 'Why,' people ask, 'did God allow it?' Was it because He loved them so much that He took them before worse terrors and tortures befell them? Theirs, maybe, was the easier death. They went straight to those many mansions their Savior had gone before to prepare for them. They had followed Him even unto death." (134)

"A little later he handed me a bundle of Chinese papers, and when I read them I understood the burden of his prayers [for England]. Every item of reported news from England, every picture, was concerned with a film star, or a sportsman, or a horse race - not one mention of God. England, seemingly so prosperous while other countries passed through terrible suffering at the hands of Communist domination, had forgotten what was all-important - the realization that God mattered in the life of a nation no less than in that of an individual.

From that time on I knew that I must go back to the land of my birth. I must return to do what I could to dispel the spiritual lethargy that had overtaken so many. I must testify to the great faith of the Chinese church. I must let people know what great things God had done for me." (136)

"Here in this land [England] with churches or chapels in almost every street, with thousands of ministers, there was a terribly apathy. I had watched hundreds of Chinese Christians, who only a few years ago had been idol worshippers, suffer terrible privations,



even torture and death for their faith. How would our so-called Christian land react if the Communist scourge attacked it?

Even in the churches themselves, the Christians appeared lukewarm. The women were dressed in the height of fashion, and social events were of much greater importance than the prayer meeting or the spread of the gospel message. It was far harder to reach the hearts of an English congregation than those of the ignorant, heathen Chinese.

I could not go back to China because of Communist persecution, but how often I longed for the uncomplicated life we had lived in Yangcheng before war and the powers of evil had swept across my adopted country." (138-139)

Topics for Discussion

What is the nature of God as Gladys sees Him? When does He intervene in earthly affairs and how directly? What does He demand of Christians?

A common subject in literature is the nature of humanity's place on the spectrum of free will versus determinism. Where might Gladys see her own life in this spectrum? Is Gladys in control of her circumstances and decisions, or is God in control?

Name three instances in which Gladys claims God directly speaks to her. Why (in Gladys' mind) might God have chosen these particular instances? What does this form of communication say about Gladys' relationship to God?

What are the advantages to the spiritual life? What are the disadvantages? Use examples from Gladys' own life.

What is Gladys' method to convert others to Christianity? How forceful should a missionary be in preaching the gospel?

The Chinese call Gladys "Ai-weh-deh," or "virtuous woman." What is virtuous about Gladys?

There is much said about "taking a stand" as a Christian. Even when bombs are dropping, Gladys refuses to leave Yangcheng, saying "Christians do not retreat." There is also the tragedy of the university students refusing to renounce Christianity, at the cost of terrible executions at the hands of the Communists. In the former case, however, Gladys soon after flees from imminent danger, and in the latter case, Gladys herself flees from China due to similar persecution. When must a Christian take a stand, and when must they fear for their own safety and escape to live another day?