

DAW NYEIN THA
joyful revolutionary

by
H. S. ADDISON

MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

HARRY ADDISON was born in the North of England in 1909 and took First Class Honours degrees at Durham and Oxford Universities. He met Dr Frank Buchman at Oxford in 1930 and has given his whole time to the work of Moral Re-Armament since 1934. He has worked in many countries in Europe and also in Asia and the United States of America. He served with the British Army Education Corps in India and Burma in 1945-46.

The cover photograph was taken at Panchgani in October 1968 by Mr Hakan Cronstoe of Sweden.

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THIS IS THE STORY of a great lady, a teacher of genius, a passionate patriot, a tireless traveller and above all a world revolutionary.

Her name was Daw Nyein Tha, and she was Burmese. She became one of her country's most widely known personalities. Thousands will never forget her vivid figure as she appeared on countless platforms across the globe, in her colourful Burmese costume with a flower, preferably a carnation, in her jet-black hair. Millions heard her voice on the radio, for she was a brilliant broadcaster. But to many hundreds she will always be remembered as "Ma Mi" — the gay, laughing, forthright woman whose friendship changed the whole course of their lives.

She was born in 1899 in Moulmein, a pleasant town and seaport looking out westwards over the Bay of Bengal. Victoria, Queen of England and Empress of India, was still ruling serenely over an Empire on which the sun never set. Her great grandfather had come from Canton in China. Her parents were people of character and faith, who taught her "to obey God and serve her country". At an early age she must have shown outstanding gifts; for she was only fourteen when the American lady Superintendent of the High School at which she was educated told her that if she would go to training college, she could return as a teacher and would soon be made headmistress. And so it turned out. At the age of twenty-two, after two years as an assistant teacher, she became the youngest headmistress in Burma.

Ten years later she was an undoubted success — an outstanding teacher and a woman who loved authority and wielded it with ease. But she was not at peace. Some of the older teachers on her staff were jealous of the gifted young woman who had been promoted over their heads. The 650 girls in her charge respected but did not love her.

There was at least one good reason why she failed to win their affection. During her last year at college she had fallen in love with a fellow student, and he with her. They became engaged to be married; and the match was approved on all sides. He was an able young man; and the college principal promised him, while still a student, a post on the teaching staff. Then his parents intervened and urged him to join the government service. Ma Mi violently disagreed. She believed that the government service was corrupt and that no honourable man could find a career in it. When he persisted, she said, "You go your way and I'll go mine", and broke off the engagement. For ten years he continued to propose to her, but she was adamant. Finally he wrote to ask her if he could marry another girl, and she said "Yes".

Recalling the episode years afterwards she said, "When you close your heart, you begin to emphasise discipline, efficiency and all that. Later, the girls told me they were afraid of me." But she was always convinced that she had made the right decision.

There was another force at work in the situation. The tide of nationalism was beginning to flow strongly in Burma as in India. The Buddhists became identified as Burmese patriots, the Christians as foreigners. In Ma Mi's school a feud broke out between the Buddhists and the Christians. The Buddhist girls sent a long list of grievances to a newspaper, which published it. There was a public outcry and a demand for an official investigation. "I was so angry," recalls Ma Mi, "that I wouldn't eat or sleep. I did not know whether I was standing on my head or my feet."

"YOU NEED NEW VISION"

She decided to run away to Rangoon for a weekend. There she stayed with an old friend who had some contact with the Oxford Group, as the work of Moral Re-Armament was then known. Ma Mi confessed to her, "I don't know how I am going back to face those girls. They have given me so much trouble. I hate them." Her friend replied, "You need new vision." And her parting shot as Ma Mi went to catch her train back to Moulmein was, "Our sins separate us from God."

On the day she returned, a committee of four, appointed by the government, all men and all Buddhists, arrived at her school

to investigate the grievances. They unanimously concluded that there was nothing in them.

Ma Mi's bitterness was not appeased. For days she wrestled with it. "One night," she recalls, "I could not sleep at all and I kept praying, 'Take this from me and give me your love.' Suddenly, as if someone were speaking to me, the thought came, 'Why don't you accept it.' I said, 'Yes' and just offered my heart. Then God's love came in, just like a great torrent of water right from the top of my head to my toes. And the hate and bitterness which I felt while I stood on my own went in the twinkling of an eye, and only love remained. I felt I could not control it. When I got up in the morning and saw the girls, they looked different. When they looked at me, they said, 'What has happened to you?' I said, 'I will tell you when I get into the classroom.' So that day, as I went into the different classrooms, I told them what had happened in the night. And I apologised to them for my hatred."

Shortly before she died she said, "I gave my life to God in 1931, and I have never taken it back."

That experience not only ended the feud in the school. It was to change the whole course of Ma Mi's life and take her to the ends of the earth.

It took her immediately on a tour of India, for which she was given two months leave from her school. After a few weeks she had seen how great was the need in India and she found herself faced with the question whether she should stay beyond the two months. "We had three days off for Christmas," she recalls. "I sat on the great rocks on the shore of Cape Comorin overlooking the ocean, and I prayed and prayed and prayed. I did not know much about listening to God, but I knew about prayer. Then one of my friends gave me a passage which read to this effect: 'Duty is alright; but when God calls, it is greater than duty.' So there and then I decided that I would obey God. I wrote to the school to tell them that I was not coming back. Hell broke loose there; but from that moment my family, my friends and the school knew that if God asked me to do something I would obey, no matter what happened to me. My family have always understood that and stood by me, for which I am most grateful."

In 1932 she was invited with a group of Asians to Britain.

They toured the British Isles from end to end and spoke at meetings great and small, including a vast rally in Westminster Central Hall in London. Finally they were received in audience at Buckingham Palace by King George V and Queen Mary. In the great hall Ma Mi saw something that she had never seen anywhere else in England — a sprig of Poinsettia on the grand piano. "It was quite a welcome to me," she says. "Since I was the only woman," she recalls, "I had to go in first and was presented to the King first. I shook hands with him. I did not know how to curtsy, and anyway I had never been told that I was supposed to curtsy. We had been warned before we went that the King spoke very gruffly and that we were not to be afraid of him. Suddenly in the middle of conversation, he turned to me and said, 'What is this I hear about you? I thought you wanted separation.' (Just about this time Burma was saying that she no longer wanted separation under the British Raj. Earlier she had been saying that she did.) I replied, "Your Majesty, whether we are politically separated or not, we should all work together for the Kingdom of God; and what we are doing is just that."

A FEW SHILLINGS LEFT

In 1935 she was invited to go to an Oxford Group Assembly at Oxford. To pay for the trip she drew all her savings, including a provident fund. As she was leaving, an old Christian leader said to her, "What will you do if you get there and then find yourself disillusioned?" She replied, "I do not know. But I believe that this is what God wants me to do, and I am going to do it."

At Oxford she met for the first time Dr Frank Buchman, the initiator of Moral Re-Armament. "I thought, 'This is a man of God,'" she recalls, "and I have worked with him ever since." One day, after she had paid her weekly bill at the Assembly, she found that she had only a few shillings left. She got down on her knees and prayed. That day she was invited to lunch with Dr Buchman. Over lunch he asked how much money she had. She told him. He replied, "I will give you £50." This was the first of many occasions during a life which from now on was one long venture of faith, when she discovered that "where God guides, he provides".

Her first impulse was to take a team back to Burma. But Dr Buchman knew that in the twentieth century only those who had committed themselves to changing the entire world are equipped to meet the needs of their own countries. He invited her to go to Denmark, whose gay and friendly people, spiritually starved for a generation by a diet of godless humanism, were responding eagerly to the Oxford Group's confident proclamation of faith in God. She accepted the invitation.

HER HOME WAS THE WORLD

That decision turned her into a world revolutionary. During the next thirty years she travelled the entire globe, not once but many times. On the blank pages of her Bible she jotted down, in a scholarly hand so minute that it sometimes defies the reader, the details of her journeyings between 1929 and 1964. The record shows that during these years she visited some forty countries, many of them several times. She went as far as North Rihsgrensen in Norway, far beyond the Arctic circle, and one of the most northerly towns in the world, and as far South as Melbourne; as far East as New Guinea and as far West as Honolulu. She crossed the United States from East to West and North to South at least eight times. More than a dozen times she traversed the length and breadth of the Indian sub-continent.

She was in Chungking and Shanghai in 1940, when China and Japan were at war. After the Second World War she was twice in Taiwan. Japan she came to know intimately through many visits. She was eight times in Germany and more often still in Britain. Between 1935 and 1964, apart from the years when she was immobilised in Burma during the Japanese occupation, she seems never to have spent a period of twelve months in any single country and only one on the same continent.

The story of her travels during these years is virtually the story of MRA's race against time to remake men and nations. She was a member of almost all the great international teams which crossed and recrossed the continents.

In August 1939 she was one of the speakers at the MRA Assembly of Nations in the Hollywood Bowl, when 30,000 packed the vast theatre and 15,000 had to be turned away. Here for the first time, with the aid of her scarf, she presented a message which later was repeated before many audiences.

“When I insist, you resist” — here she pulled the scarf tight — “and there is a clash. When I do not insist, you cannot resist” — and she let the scarf fall slack — “and we can find out together what is right, what God wants, and we can do it together.”

Later that year she paid the first of her eight visits to Japan. “As I sailed into Yokohama harbour in December, 1938,” she recalls, “I looked at the beautiful Mount Fuji covered with snow; and God said to me, ‘This is your country and these are your people’. Even at that early date God was teaching me that any country to which He sends me is my country, and any people to whom He sends me are my people.”

From Japan she flew to Shanghai, where for the first time she saw the havoc which bombing could do to a city, and on to Chungking. There in January 1940, in a boatyard in the River Yangtse under the cliffs of Chungking, she took part in an MRA Assembly.

She returned to Burma later that year to work in Rangoon with Bishop George West, the Anglican Bishop, and his wife Grace. Together they became the friends and confidants of many of the men who were to be the architects of their country’s independence, including U Aung San.

“GO AND SEE GANDHIJI”

She was living there when in May 1940 the thought came to her, “Go and see Gandhiji.” This is how she tells the story. “I said, ‘Who am I to go and see this uncrowned King of India?’ But God said again, ‘Go and see Gandhiji’.” An unexpected gift of money had just reached her, and her friends felt she ought to go. There was room available on a plane going to Calcutta on the following day. “The next morning when I got into the plane,” she recalls, “There was one Indian man and myself — just two Asians among the white people. The two of us were put in the baggage compartment with all the baggage. Everything within me rose up and I was angry. Then God said to me, ‘Now look here young lady, are you going to see Gandhiji with that in your heart?’ I said, ‘God, I am very sorry. Please forgive me.’”

At Calcutta, the pressmen were waiting to meet her. One of them said. “You are going to see Gandhiji?” She said, “Yes”. “What are you going to say to him?” “I haven’t told him yet.”

she retorted, "so I am not going to tell you."

To her surprise and joy, she discovered that Roger Hicks, an Englishman working with MRA, and an old friend of the Mahatma, was already with him at his ashram. He was at the railway station to meet her after a long train journey. "We got to the ashram in a dogcart. When we arrived, they were all sitting round having prayers. After prayers, Gandhiji came towards me and said, 'Hello stranger, how are you?' So I said, 'Mr Gandhi, I do not feel like a stranger any more. I feel very much at home here.' He said, 'You came to see me?' I replied, 'Yes! God sent me to you.'

"So he took me to his hut. I said, 'Mr Gandhi, God told me to tell you to call all India to return to Him.' He was quiet for a moment. Then he said, 'That is a very difficult thing for one man to do.' So that gave me a chance to tell him not what one man could do, but what God could do through one man. I told him about Frank Buchman and the miracles that were happening in Burma. He asked me how long I could stay. I said, 'Mr Gandhi, my work is done and I must go back tomorrow.' He replied, 'You must come back and stay with me as long as possible.' I said, 'I will, when God sends me back to you again.'

"When the time came to retire, Gandhi said to me, 'We all sleep on the ground, but where would you like to sleep?' Now when he said that he slept on the ground, who was I to say that I would like a cot? So very brightly I said, 'Mr Gandhi, I will sleep on the ground too.' He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, wagged his finger at me, and said, 'It is very difficult if you are not used to it, to sleep on the ground all at once.' So I said, 'Mr Gandhi, may I have a cot?' He wagged his finger at me again and said, 'You see, the difficulty with you is that you only hear what God says to you. I also hear what the Devil says.' So a cot was brought. Next morning he asked me to go for a walk with him. So I trotted after him, as he walked very fast." Before she left, he invited her to come back whenever she wished.

Daw Nyein Tha did not see the Mahatma again. But soon afterwards the thought came to her, "Gandhiji and the Viceroy should listen to God together. God has a much bigger plan for India than either Gandhiji or the Viceroy dreams of." She

wrote the thought down and sent it to him. He wrote back, "I want you to know that I do listen to God." Very soon afterwards the newspapers reported that Gandhiji had gone to see the Viceroy. But what they talked about she never knew.

She was in Burma when the Japanese overran and occupied it in 1942. Of the years that followed she said: "I was separated from all my friends around the world. I didn't have to know where they were. I just had to think of this one and that one and send my heart up to God and out to them."

As soon as the occupation ended, she returned to Rangoon. The writer of this sketch happened to be there with the British Army when she arrived. Her laugh was as gay and her faith as invincible as ever. She told amazing stories of how obedience to the whisper of God's voice had more than once saved her and her family from certain death, and how even the Japanese soldiers had been challenged by her courage and her freedom from hate and fear.

HONESTY ON TWO FEET

By this time she had become a national figure. On National Day she was invited, with General Aung San, now Prime Minister, to speak to the nation over the radio. A Government report on bribery and corruption had just been published. She did not mention it. But she tackled the issue squarely. "What is the answer to all this dishonesty?" she asked. And she replied, "The answer to dishonesty is — an honest man. I would like to see honesty walking on two feet. Gentlemen, may I remind you, you all have two feet."

"I am not interested," she continued, "in moderate honesty. Who wants to draw most of his salary? To eat an egg that is moderately good? To live in a house that keeps out most of the rain? To travel in a ship that floats most of the time?"

"The trouble with us," she said, "is that we are an individualistic people. Look at that word — five 'i's and one 'u'; and the 'i's come first. Then look at the word 'unity' — one 'u' and one 'i'; and the 'u' comes first."

The speech was printed, given to every student in Rangoon University, taken to every Buddhist monastery, and sent to every village in the land.

By July 1947 she was once more in Europe at Mountain

House, Caux, a tourist hotel bought at great sacrifice by the MRA men and women of Switzerland, and opened as a world centre for Moral Re-Armament in the previous year. She was there in July when the news came of the assassination of Aung San with many of his cabinet. So too was U Tin Tut, Burma's brilliant Foreign Minister, who on hearing the news said, "The only unfailing light in this dark world is the light of Moral Re-Armament."

She was part of the MRA force which in 1948 went to the ruined cities of West Germany and brought fresh hope and faith to millions in the grip of despair and nihilism. She returned there in 1949 with Mrs Aung San, widow of the Prime Minister, who became her close friend.

In 1952 and 1953 she accompanied the force of two hundred and fifty under Dr Buchman's leadership which travelled through Ceylon and India. Two years later she was with the World Mission, two hundred and fifty strong from 28 countries, which travelled across Asia, the Middle East and Africa, led by Peter Howard, and presented his musical play *The Vanishing Island* in California, Chicago, Washington, Honolulu, Tokyo, Taiwan, Manila, Bangkok, Rangoon, Colombo, Delhi, Madras, Calcutta, Karachi, Teheran, Baghdad, Cairo, Nairobi, and covered 35,000 miles in just over eleven weeks. She was present in the theatre at Manila when the distinguished Japanese delegation, officially representing their Prime Minister, spoke before a packed house after a performance of *The Vanishing Island* and turned the hostile audience from angry mutterings to prolonged applause by their moving apology and plea for forgiveness.

HER PEOPLE RESPOND

She had the joy of seeing the people of her own country respond wholeheartedly. She went with the mission to Kenya, where the Mau Mau emergency was still at its height, and visited the Athi River detention camp, where 1,200 men, all hard-core Mau Mau leaders, were so won by the humanity and candour of the MRA people that of their own accord they collected £27 in pennies as their contribution to the expenses of the mission. She accompanied it on its further journeyings through Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Italy, France, Germany, Holland and Britain. In Helsinki she met U Nu, Prime Minister

of her country, who, on his way back from a visit to Moscow, stopped there specially so that he could see *The Vanishing Island* and the African play *Freedom*.

In March, 1957 she took part in an Assembly for the Nations of the Pacific at Baguio in the Philippines, of which a distinguished leader from Taiwan said, "What we have failed to achieve in ten years of post-war diplomatic effort has been accomplished here." Next year she travelled through the deep South of the United States as a member of the cast of another musical play, *The Crowning Experience*, dramatising the life of Mary McLeod Bethune, the great negro woman educator. She was in Little Rock, Arkansas, at a moment when its race riots were capturing the headlines of the world's press, and became a close friend of Daisy Bates, the militant leader of the Negro women.

In 1960 she was with a group who visited Cyprus and met Archbishop Makarios in his monastery in the mountains. She was Mrs Aung San's companion in India and Burma. When the new Asian Centre for Moral Re-Armament was opened at Odawara in Japan by the Prime Minister, she was again one of the delegates, and travelled as far north as Hokkaido. To her dying day she kept by her a newspaper cutting which reported that the delegates, at the invitation of Mr Shinji Sogo, Governor of the Japanese National Railways, travelled in the world's fastest train on a test run during which it reached a record speed of 190 kilometers a hour.

At the end of 1961 she was in Kerala and took part in a demonstration at which 90,000 people crowded into the stadium in Trivandrum to hear an international force of Moral Re-Armament.

By the beginning of 1963 she was sixty-three years old. The previous thirty years had been years of arduous travel and — during the Japanese occupation — of great hardship and danger. From July of that year until October 1968 she lived either in Switzerland or in Britain. But her mind and heart continued to roam the world. It was always a particular joy to her to meet the Asian delegates who year by year attended the conference of the ILO at Geneva. Many of them would come up for weekends to Caux, where they found a welcome and faith which they did not always find at the other end of the lake.

China was always at the centre of her thinking. Her great

grandfather had come to Burma from Canton. She herself had been in Shanghai and Chungking in 1940 and in Taiwan in 1955 and 1958. She was convinced that one day that mighty country would find an idea that would be the next step for the Communist and the non-Communist worlds alike. "The time will come," she wrote in February 1967, "when all of us together, from Japan to Pakistan and India with Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Ceylon, with Africa, Latin America, the United States and Europe, will bring this message to the teeming millions of my great-grandfather's land to the north of Burma. That, I believe, is the destiny of MRA throughout the world. This coming generation will teach the rulers of the world how to govern their nations effectively, eliminating social injustice and economic hardship, bringing peace and serenity to the whole world, through obedience to the living God. The world will then be governed by men governed by God."

AN IDEOLOGY FOR CHINA

In September 1968, just before she left Switzerland for her last trip to Asia, she wrote again: "I believe that our only hope in Asia is that we give God's ideology to one another and together to China. It is estimated that by the year 2000 China will have 1,700 million people. But God is working mightily, and as we are faithful to His directions He will work in His own way. He will fill us to overflowing with the inner discipline we need to be real revolutionaries, men and women of passion, patience, purity and persistence."

She was always thinking, too, of that other great country committed to world revolution. In March 1968 she writes, "Russia needs God. Russia has banished God. The Americans have forgotten God, and the rest of the world are either one or the other. The world needs to turn back to God and let Him direct us, inform us, control us. Only the pure in heart shall see God. And if we are going to give to the world the abundant life and the joy of living and being with the Lord, then living absolute purity is the price we have to pay. It is the pearl of great price, and when we pay that price we know the joy of possessing it. We have no secrets to hide. We can look everyone in the eye. And God can dwell in our hearts with all His care and peace.

We can give to others only what we have ourselves. Only when we have God can He flow through us to the Russians and Americans and Chinese, the Asians, Africans, Europeans and everybody we come into contact with. That is what we are living for; and that is what MRA is all about."

While her mind and heart roved across the world, Ma Mi remained to the end a passionate Burmese patriot, and she was intensely proud of her Burmese citizenship. Her Burmese passport, issued in May 1961, was due to expire in May 1966. A year earlier, she applied for a new passport. In spite of repeated efforts it never reached her, and she became officially a refugee, with a Swiss Refugee Identity Card. At the end of 1967 she received a letter from the Burmese Embassy in London requesting her to fill in application forms for a passport. She did so immediately, and sent them back by hand to the London embassy. But she never heard anything further. One of her last letters, written from Colombo on 20 January 1969, when she knew that she was suffering from cancer, and addressed to a friend in Rangoon, is a final plea that some further action should be taken. "I am Burmese," she writes, "and a loyal Burmese citizen."

She requests her friend to get in touch immediately with a certain person who may be able to expedite the matter. "Please tell him that with this cancer in my system I do not know how many weeks or months or years I have left on this earth. If he could help me to get a Burmese passport good for at least five years, then I can die as a Burmese citizen and not as a Swiss refugee. I am sure you will understand and he will understand I shall be most grateful if you will treat this as a very urgent matter, as my days are numbered."

REJECTION — OR ACCEPTANCE

Yet even the bitterness of this experience sent her back to God and deepened her devotion to Him. In May 1968 she writes, "Last December I had word from the embassy in London asking me to apply for a passport. All my hopes bubbled forth that I would no longer be a refugee without a country. As week after week and month after month passed by, I began to get strained I felt neglected One day I asked the Lord to show me why I was finding people so difficult. The first thought that

came to me when I woke up next morning was, 'You feel deeply hurt by your country's apparent rejection of you. You have been brushing it aside as if it did not matter. So a sense of rejection by individuals or groups has taken hold of you. Jesus was rejected by His people and nailed to the Cross. If it had not been for the Cross there would not have been any resurrection. The key word is not rejection but acceptance.

"That means acceptance of just being a child of God instead of a citizen of a particular country. Acceptance of all the discipline of obedience instead of braving rejection by people. Acceptance of the place where God puts me as my country instead of longing to go back. Acceptance of the idea that I may never see my family again. Acceptance of the fact that I belong to Him only when I give myself unreservedly to Him. And what is more, acceptance of everything that comes — joyfully, gratefully, and contentedly.'

"There are millions of refugees all over the world," she continues, "people who have been rejected because of their colour, race, religion, ideology, social status, etc. The Lord is so graciously teaching me how to live as a refugee, or as one of a 'minority' — as a refugee without a passport from the country where I was born, and which I have thought of as 'my country' for 68 years. God has given me the privilege to enjoy living in any country where He has put me as my own country, and not to keep longing to go back 'home'. Being a refugee is not something new. St Paul spoke of men of faith in Hebrews 11:37-40, 'Many became refugees with nothing but sheepskins and goat-skins to cover them,' and 'We who are refugees from this dying world.' (Hebrews 6:18)

"I am most grateful for this Refugee Identity Card which Switzerland has given me. God has been wonderfully good to me all these years. He could not have given me a more beautiful country to live in, nor to be among so many warm-hearted, caring people who have taken me in as part of their families. Then, of course, a whole big, international family at Caux. Yes, as Jesus said in Matthew 19:29, 'Every man who has left home or brother or sister, or father or mother or children or land for my sake will receive it back many times over, and will inherit eternal life.'"

The unflinching support of her parents greatly strengthened her.

In 1955, when her father was 88 and she was far away in the United States, the family doctor wrote to tell her that he was getting frail and that her place was by his side. The old man got wind of it and promptly instructed one of his daughters to send her this message: "Don't you come back because people tell you to. Come when God tells you to."

As her father's 100th birthday on 28 January 1967 drew nearer, a friend wrote to Ma Mi saying that if it were right for her to go back to Burma for the occasion, he would help find the money. "You can imagine how I felt," she writes (17 February 1967). "I told the Lord: 'Lord, what do you want me to do? I can't put my mind on anything. I am just too homesick for words. Where do you want me to be? I will obey, whatever it is passport or no passport, I only want to be where you want me to be.'

"He said: 'I still have work for you to do here. I am with you. I am with your father and your family in Burma. They want you to obey Me and be here with Me. Never mind what people will say. This will test your care for Me, and your commitment to Me. She who cares for father or family or country more than Me is not worthy of Me, nor worthy to be a fellow-worker with Me. Of course you miss your family. Don't press it down, but give it to Me. I will use it to enrich your capacity for obedience to Me, enlarging the means of passing it on to others, just one by one, so that in their turn they will obey Me too. Now give me all your homesickness, and rest in peace, for tomorrow will be a wonderful day.'"

Her family and friends sent her such detailed accounts of the celebrations that she was able to send out a letter describing them as vividly as if she had been there herself.

'GRATITUDE IS THE GLUE'

Once more a sacrifice which might have embittered her brought her closer to God. She writes, "These days I am learning so much about obedience and gratitude. Real freedom, joy and peace come only in obedience to the Father's will. Obedience not through fear or against your will, but as a free choice, because your greatest desire and pleasure is to do His will, so that He may work out His plan for the whole world. Forced obedience is materialism. Obedience through fear is hate. There will

then be sit-down strikes, go-slows, sabotage of one kind or another and the work will not be 100%, either in time or quality. The food at Caux is so good because the cooks do their work with all their heart and mind and will, doing it for Him and for people, because of their care and obedience to their Father.

"There can never be the brotherhood of man without the Fatherhood of God. How can you have brothers and sisters if you have no Father? Home is where the Father is. You cannot be 'at home' unless the Father is there. Obedience through fear is reluctant and resentful. Obedience through gratitude is joyful, instant and spontaneous. Gratitude is like an overflowing stream, positive, outgoing. It is a powerful antiseptic, that kills the germs of bitterness. 'The best defence for your country is the gratitude and respect of your neighbour,' said Frank Buchman. Gratitude is the glue that binds and unites you to your neighbour. It is the salt that flavours all inspired relationships. A grateful heart is a normal heart."

On 4 December 1967 a cable reached Ma Mi telling her of her father's homegoing. "My first thought," she writes, "was that he was with mother and Frank (Buchman) and Peter (Howard), and gratitude for the most precious legacy of faith in God that he and mother had given to their children. It was because of him that I learnt the real meaning of the word 'father' Neither he nor the rest of the family had ever asked me to come home for family or any other reason. Instead, they have expected and encouraged me as the most natural thing, to be only where God wants me to be."

A few days earlier she had received a letter from Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of the Mahatma. The first building of Asia Plateau, the new Moral Re-Armament Training Centre at Panchgani in Maharashtra, had just been completed and was about to be opened. The letter read: "Do you think it will be possible for you to come to Panchgani? You know how welcome you would be. It is your centre, and you should be hosting the place. May I request you to take this to guidance and see what the Lord orders?" She did so, and the clear thought that came was, "Your heart, your mind, your prayers, your spirit, your money, your help can all go there, but you must stay here just now. You will be there one day, but not just yet. This is where the action is for the moment."

On 6 August 1968 she received another letter from Rajmohan Gandhi. It invited her to join an international force which was to visit Ceylon and perhaps other countries in South East Asia. This time there was no red light. "For five days before your letter arrived," she wrote in reply, "each day in the mail there was a gift. . . . After the third day I thought God must be sending this money for a purpose. Then your letter came. Deep within me I have a sense that this is right and that somehow I will be given visas for these countries."

Just five weeks later she was able to send a letter to many scores of people. "Thanks a million," it read, "to each one of you from seventeen countries who have made it possible for me to go on this 'Asia Arise' mission. Since Rajmohan's letter reached me, God has sent me enough money for my fare, through you."

She planned to leave Caux in time for a conference at Panchgani at the end of the month. But before doing so, she was advised to have a medical check-up in Geneva. X-ray pictures revealed that there was something wrong in the stomach. The doctors gave her permission to travel on condition that she had another X-ray picture taken in December.

INDIA—A LASER BEAM

In the last week of October she arrived by air in Bombay and flew on to Poona. There she met several old friends from Britain and Holland. Together they motored up to Panchgani. Three weeks later she wrote from Colombo. "You will understand what it meant to me — to see God's continuing strategy for Asia in the concrete form of Asia Plateau with Rajmohan Gandhi right there and a young Indian from Fiji in the Pacific, two others from Kenya, one from the Sudan and many others from different continents. The thought that came to me that morning was: 'Panchgani will teach the world that we are all children of God, how to obey Him, and that obedience to the Father is not just a duty but a privilege and a joy, that we will do it together, and that nations will come running to Panchgani because of the Lord her God. She will give lasting peace and serenity to this troubled, confused and hungry world, hungry for a sense of the living God. It will be a home to people of many nations.

"Go with your heart wide open. You are at home with your family who are out to listen and obey Me, through whom I am

working out My plan for India. India is my laser beam for Asia and all of you together will give Me to the whole world. So just be open, be simple, be obedient and be faithful. I am with you. I will go with you wherever I send you. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. The world will look and wonder and be thankful. Then they will come to Me."

After five days at Asia Plateau she flew back to Bombay and then on to Colombo. The present writer was with her on the plane, and also rode in the same car from the Colombo airport to the city. She was like a child exclaiming with joy as she saw once more all the familiar trees and shrubs and flowers of Asia — "teak and tamarind, bamboo and padank, orchids and jasmin, and so many others which I have lived with all my life," as she put it in a letter written a few days later.

It was in Kandy, the ancient capital of Ceylon, that she celebrated her sixty-ninth birthday. She spoke to the "Asia Arise" force on the theme that was constantly in her mind during these days — "God's continuing strategy for Asia and the world". Later she repeated much of her talk for the tape recorder. She recalled how Dr Buchman had met Gandhiji in 1915, how his sons Devadas and Manilal were his life-long friends, and how his grandson Rajmohan Gandhi had taken on the task of turning Asia Godward. She reminded them that in the same year, 1915, Dr Buchman had met Baron Shibusawa, the architect of modern Japan, and that in 1948, after the disaster of the Second World War, his grandson, then Finance Minister, had come to an MRA conference at Mackinac Island with a group of Japanese leaders, including the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, governors, members of Parliament and labour leaders.

A PLAN TO LINK THE GENERATIONS

She recalled her own meeting with the Oxford Group in 1932, and her association with Bishop West and all that had meant for her own country. She spoke of her host and hostess in Colombo, Devar Surya Sena and his wife Nelun, who in the 1930s had come to Britain to interpret the music of Ceylon to the West, and there had been caught up in God's continuing strategy for their continent. As she talked, those who listened began to grasp the idea that they were not just a group of young

people who had decided to work for a period with MRA, but chosen men and women, picked out to be part of a Plan which linked land with land, continent with continent, and generation with generation.

She spoke with a prophetic vision and passion which no one who heard her will ever forget. But she was far from well. When the force went on to Madras and Assam she had to stay in Colombo and go into hospital. An exploratory operation revealed a malignant growth on the pancreas which had spread to the liver, and could not be removed by an operation. Her friend and medical adviser, Dr Roderick Evans, told her the facts. "Even though I had suspected something like this," she wrote to Rajmohan Gandhi on 20 December, "it was a bit of a shock. We listened together and the words that came to me were, 'To those who love God, who are called according to His plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.'" (Romans 8:28, Phillips' translation.)

"The next morning, 17 December, when I opened my Bible for the daily reading, it was about 5 a.m. and here I was with this tremendous passage in Isaiah 30:1-5¹ facing me.

"All by myself I had to laugh at the way our loving, laughing Father speaks to us. So, whether it be days or weeks or months or years, each day is to be lived in obedience with joy and gratitude. I am in His loving hands and this is enough for me. I have a tremendous sense that this is where God wants me at this moment to fit into His purpose. What a privilege to be part of His plan for the whole world."

She writes with gratitude of the loving care which friends and hospital staff had heaped upon her, and of the fact that Dr Austin, the distinguished surgeon who had performed the operation, had given his services free.

¹"Now Hezekiah fell ill and was at the point of death; the prophet Isaiah... went and gave him this message from the Eternal, 'Put your affairs in order, for you are to die, not to recover.' Then Hezekiah... prayed to the Eternal, 'O Eternal, pray remember how I have lived ever mindful of Thee, honestly and heartily, and how I have done what was right in Thy sight!' Hezekiah wept aloud. Then this word came from the Eternal to Isaiah: 'Go and give Hezekiah this message from the Eternal, the God of his father David, "I have heard your prayers, I have seen your tears, and I now add fifteen years to your life"'".

"Meanwhile," she goes on, "as I begin to be able to move around a bit, I've had interesting talks with Sisters and patients and their visitors. Today I had a long talk with the head of this establishment about God's strategy for Asia and her part in it. One man is reading *Frank Buchman's Secret*.

"If God wills," she concludes, "perhaps I shall be with you in Panchgani in February. Just step by step, and I shall be home again. The wonder of it all — Asia Plateau — God's continuing strategy. May God continue using you gloriously for it all." And she signed the letter, "With overwhelming joy and gratitude, Daw Nyein Tha."

She spent Christmas 1968 in hospital. By the beginning of February she was strong enough to make the journey to Panchgani. For a moment she hoped that there might yet be a miracle of healing, but she accepted with complete serenity the fact that the deadly disease was taking its course. From that moment she never gave a thought to herself. Her mind roved the world, but it dwelt also on the leaders from many parts of India and the world who had come to Panchgani for a conference.

POLITICIANS UNITED

Day after day she thought and prayed for them, one by one. Often she would invite to her room some individual or group, and share with them some inspired thought which God had given her for them. One morning three politicians from the hill tribes of Assam went to see her. They were deeply divided. They wanted to come one by one, but she insisted that they should come together. They left her room determined to put aside their differences and work together to make their State a pattern of unity for India.

Five ladies from Ceylon representing every race and religion in their country visited her. She used her hand — as she had done so often in the past — to demonstrate to them that one finger alone was practically useless, but that with all five working together a hand could do what it was meant to do. An agnostic professor of psychology prayed at her bedside for the first time in his life and began to find a faith which transformed his life. March 8th was my birthday. When I came down to breakfast I was overwhelmed to find that there was a present from her on my breakfast table. On that same day two of her old friends

were married in Bombay. The bride sent her wedding bouquet to her, and she was able to appreciate its beauty when it was shown to her on the following morning.

A few minutes before midnight that day she died. Rajmohan Gandhi and a few of her oldest friends, who had just returned from the wedding, were at her bedside.

From early morning on the following day she lay in a ground floor room opening on to the garden. She was in her Burmese dress with a white rose in her hair and her hands clasped — the expressive hands which had so often illustrated a story or driven a point home. A steady stream of people — old friends, workers on the estate, neighbours from the villages — come to pay their respects.

At 4.15 in the afternoon her friends gathered in the garden around her flowerstrewn coffin, which had been brought out on to the verandah. A simple service was led by Mr R. D. Mathur, director of Asia Plateau. Two of her favourite passages from the Bible were read, St John 14:1-3 and Romans 8:35-39. The chorus sang two of the hymns she most loved which they had often sang for her outside her bedroom — “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” and “The Lord is My Shepherd”. Rajmohan Gandhi spoke simply of her life and work, and his words were translated into Marathi for the sake of the many villagers and their families who knew no English.

The cemetery lies two miles away from Asia Plateau, and the road to it goes through the town. It was still gaily bedecked with flags for a recent festival. As the procession passed through its main street, several more people joined it. At the cemetery, the boys' choir of St Peter's School were waiting to sing at the committal service, as well as girls and staff from St Joseph's Convent. Canon Llewellyn of Poona took the service, and “Abide with Me” was sung. After the coffin had been lowered into the grave, practically everybody remained behind, asking question after question about the Burmese lady whose last days had made such an impact upon the lives of so many people.

Before she died, she had said, “I want to be in the open and not near a wall.” That wish was gloriously granted. The place where she lies looks out over the majestic panorama of the Western Ghats, fold upon fold as far as the eye can see.

The following morning many of her friends met to remember

her. One after another they came forward unbidden to say what her friendship had meant to them. A member of the Panchgani Municipal Council said, "She had given everything. When you have no greed and nothing to hang on to, you have nothing to fear." A leading woman from the town recalled how Ma Mi had challenged her to "stand by Mr Gandhi and join his fight", and pledged herself to accept the challenge. One of the young nurses who had cared for her spoke of the discipline in her life, and her demand for an equal discipline in the lives of those around her. "She never let anything go by. And she told me that it was no good being busy with my hands if I was not busy with my heart."

Her doctor recalled how she had sent a message to a group of doctors who enquired about her. "I am grateful for the doctors," she had said. "But there is a bigger job for them — to heal the hates and hurts in the hearts of men. To do that they must find healing for their own hates and hurts." The man who swept her room daily told how she had enquired about his family. "When I told her that my wife was expecting a baby, she gave me ten rupees for her. Later I took my wife to meet her." He recalled one thing which Ma Mi had said to him, "Work with absolute honesty and God will be good to you."

A few weeks after her passing, a group of old friends from Burma visited Ma Mi's grave. They were U Nu, three times Prime Minister and one of the world's outstanding Buddhists, his son and secretary. From her own much-travelled Bible he read the 23rd Psalm. Then he laid upon her grave a wreath of beautiful flowers, "From U Nu, and from her Burmese family and friends."

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