

Friend of China: Lady Dorothea Hosie (1885-1959)

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Lady Dorothea Hosie was the daughter of WE Soothill, missionary/scholar and sinologist, and wife of Sir Alexander Hosie, diplomat. She was regarded as an authority on China in her own right and this paper will give a biographical account of Lady Hosie with attention to her writings and travels.

Early days

Lady Hosie was born at Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, China in 1885. Her parents William Soothill¹ and his wife Lucy, from Halifax, Yorkshire, were missionaries of the United Methodist Free Churches Mission serving at Wenzhou. Their daughter was baptised Dorothy but the British consul at Wenzhou registered her name as Dorothea saying, 'I thought Dorothea, Gift of God, the better name: nearer the original Greek'.²

She went to England for education in 1892, probably staying with Yorkshire relatives but from around 1900-03 went to school near a slum area of London (probably in the East End). There her faith in a Universal Father was shaken by stories of human brutality experienced by some fellow pupils; 'if He existed, He must be either very weak or very cruel'.³ Back in Wenzhou she intended to return to Britain to become a doctor 'in the East End of London'.⁴ However, as she could not study medicine for a couple of years and being deeply moved by seeing Chinese girls with bound feet she decided to 'do what I could, where I could'.⁵ She spent the mornings supplying 'the only woman's hands to help with the nursing at the hospital'.⁶ In the afternoons she introduced physical exercises and enjoyable games⁷ to her mother's girls' school⁸ and this helped to precipitate the very controversial rule that pupils were required to have unbound feet.⁹

¹ <http://www.bdcconline.net/en/stories/s/soothill-william.php>

² Soothill, Lucy, *A Passport to China*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931, p 48. Referred to as *Passport*. In a letter to her and Victor in 1931 he addresses her as Dorothy.

³ Hosie, Lady Dorothea, *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung: A tale of Modern Peking*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1944, p. 73. Referred to as *Pool*.

⁴ *Pool*, p. 73.

⁵ *Pool*, p. 74.

⁶ Hosie, Lady Dorothea, *Brave New China*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940 edn, p. 223. Referred to as *BNC*.

⁷ *Passport*, p. 193.

⁸ *Passport*, p. 189.

⁹ *Pool*, p. 76. Footbinding had been made illegal in 1902 but it was some time before this was fully enforced, Key, John, *China: A History*, London: Harper Press, 2009, p. 480.

Sometimes she accompanied her father ‘on his excursions into districts where the Gospel had never before been preached and admiring his brilliant presentation of the New Testament stories in Chinese garb. His faith and that of the Chinese converts made a deep impression upon her.’¹⁰

Dorothea’s brother, Victor (1888-1956), became a doctor but Dorothea did not, after all, study medicine. Instead, she read Medieval and Modern Languages at Cambridge University.¹¹ Her studies at Newnham College were funded by the success of her father’s Chinese Dictionary.¹²

Return to China

Her medical ambition became an educational one because although some girls were being educated in China the daughters of aristocrats, potentially the most influential females, were neglected. She shared this vision with a fellow Newnham student, Miss Bowden-Smith, who became the venture’s senior partner. After Teacher Training at Bedford College, London, Dorothea joined her friend at Chair lane, Beijing.

Soon after opening the school the October 1911 revolution broke out and they stayed for a few months at the British Legation. In early 1912 after a frightening combination of rioting and robbery directed Miss Bowden-Smith decided to work and live with a Confucianist teacher and Dorothea stayed with the Kung family at Tientsin. It was unusual if not unknown for a European to be a house guest with a Chinese family and an English acquaintance was shocked.¹³ After a very happy time she returned to Beijing and announced her engagement to Sir Alexander Hosie, who was retiring from the consular service in China.

By August 1912 the Soothills were safely back in England and when her father gave lectures at Oxford on Chinese religions at a summer school Dorothea was drawn in to speak¹⁴ and ‘Two lectures I induced my daughter to give on the Family Life and Religion of the Chinese... met with so appreciative an audience that my confidence was fully justified.’¹⁵ Material from these lectures were probably included in her 1924 book, *Two Gentlemen of China*.

Lady Hosie: On the Isle of Wight.

¹⁰ Salisbury Circuit Life Magazine, March 1950, p 19.

¹¹ She was listed in Class II in the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos in 1909, *The Times*, 17 June 1909.

¹² ‘And they Offered their Gifts ...’ *Methodist Recorder*, uncertain date, January mid 1940s.

¹³ *Two Gentlemen of China*, p. 75.

¹⁴ Soothill, W.E., *The Three Religions of China*, p. viii.

¹⁵ *Two Gentlemen of China*, p. 9.

Sir Alexander Hosie (1853-1925), was more than twice her age¹⁶ and in the Consular Service his remit was chiefly trade. He had written authoritatively on Manchuria and as a highly regarded amateur naturalist had a plant named after him. His first wife died in 1905 and he was knighted in 1907. His son, also Alexander, had attended Cambridge University and was embarking on a business career in Calcutta along with being very active in cricket and other sports.

The relationship with a much older man may have raised a few eyebrows but Dorothea was an independent, strong minded young woman able to make her own decisions. She discussed the spiritual side of their future together ‘and I said to him he must promise to accompany me at least once a week to church service.’¹⁷ They were married on 2 January 1913¹⁸ at Richmond Congregational Church with Dorothea’s uncle, the Revd Alfred Soothill, helping in the service and settled at Sandown, Isle of Wight, and became active in island life. Dorothea, from 1916-24, was a member of the I.o.W. education committee as well as being involved in the Girl Guide movement.¹⁹

In 1919 Sir Alexander ‘revisited China on a trade commission, and was retained as special attaché in Peking until early in 1920’. This brought Dorothea back to her beloved China where the couple travelled widely and went to remote places. The fruit of their travels was Philips's Commercial Map of China (1922), which they edited. Unfortunately, Sir Alexander’s right foot was amputated in 1922 and his health deteriorated thereafter and much of Dorothea’s time was spent in looking after him. However, certain activities were possible.

When, in 1923, a large part of Central China was flooded Dorothea gave a lantern lecture to raise funds. Little profit was made but an elderly pensioner gave her a shilling at church and when her husband observed that as her tongue had not been very successful she should use her pen she wrote to a local newspaper about the flood and famine and the response enabled her to send £30 for relief in China.²⁰

Her literary profile started to emerge around that time. She wrote articles for magazines and her first book, *Two Gentlemen of China*, was published in 1924. It described her time with Chinese people in 1912. She tried to avoid controversy and ‘to set down simply and

¹⁶ W. E. Soothill, K. D. Reynolds, ‘Hosie, Sir Alexander (1853–1925)’, rev. K. D. Reynolds, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34005>, accessed 28 Nov 2011]

¹⁷ *Jesus and Woman*, 1956 ed., p. 77.

¹⁸ *The Times*, 7 Jan 1913.

¹⁹ *DNB* and ‘HOSIE, Lady (Dorothea)’, *Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920–2008; online edn, Oxford University Press, Dec 2007. [<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U238816>, accessed 5 Oct 2012].

²⁰ *Jesus and Woman*, 1946, p. 101f., and 1956, p. 118.

without comment, my experiences amongst you.’²¹

Widowed – travels and to Oxford.

Sir Alexander died on 10 March 1925. Dorothea, worn out with nursing her husband happened in her grief upon a Roman Catholic Church where Martha’s words embroidered on the altar cloth spoke to her; “‘The Master is come,” I read, “and calleth for thee.””²² This helped her to accept her husband’s death and to rededicate her life to Christ. Her father was now Professor of Chinese at Oxford University and in 1926 was part of Lord Willingdon’s delegation to China to sort out the Boxer indemnity. Mrs Soothill and Dorothea went along too. She met old friends and made new ones and the result was *A Chinese Lady*, 1929. It is full of conversations that show how she and those she met thought about things and on her return she spoke, wrote and broadcast about the journey and aspects of China.

A Chinese Lady was written at her parents’ home in Oxford where she stayed until the mid-1930s. In 1930 the Passion Play at Oberammergau in Southern Bavaria deeply impressed her by its presentation of Jesus’ humanity and her realisation that half of Jesus’ friends were women. This had long standing implications for her as did another event that year. At her stepson’s marriage on 9 July she met Miss G.M. Starkey and others from Brampton Down School, a small boarding school for girls at Folkestone, and the friendships that ensued played a significant part in her future.

Although Dorothea was increasingly involved in caring for her ageing parents she was able to do some other things. In early 1931 she gave a series of lectures on China in Canada and the USA. Her mother was taken seriously ill but embargoed news until the lecture tour ended. As soon as she heard of her mother’s illness Dorothea headed straight for home but word of Lucy’s death came while she was still on the Atlantic. Her mother had just completed *A Passport to China*, her reminiscences of life in China. Dorothea corrected the proofs and contributed a Foreword and Postscript.

In April 1932 Dorothea was inducted as President of the National Free Church Women’s Council.²³ Possibly triggered by the Oberammergau visit she chose as her theme ‘Christ’s Company of Women’.²⁴ She was also drawn into other organisations. The Bible Society made her an Honorary Governor for Life from 1933.²⁵ The Methodist Church, created in 1932, formed a Faith and Order Committee and from 1934 Dorothea was a member until her death 25 years later. Matters discussed included Women and the Ministry and her

²¹ *Two Gentlemen of China*, p. 9.

²² *Jesus and Woman*, 1946, p. 256.

²³ *The Times*, 5 April 1932.

²⁴ *Jesus and Woman*, 1956, p. xiii.

²⁵ *British and Foreign Bible Society, Hundred and Thirty Third Report*, 1937, xiii, xvii.

interest in the role of women suggests that she was active in that discussion.

After her Free Church Women's Presidency she spent about three years caring for her father who was in failing health.²⁶ She also helped him with his Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist vocabulary. He wrote, 'As to my daughter, Lady Hosie, I have no words to express my personal indebtedness to her. Without her loving and unflagging aid as amanuensis, I should have been unable to finish my part in this work'.²⁷ Later, she edited an edition of her father's translation of the *Analects of Confucius* (1937) and, with G.F. Hudson, his master work, *The Hall of Light*, (1951).

After Oxford.

After her father's death Dorothea travelled to India, Australia and Java concluding with a tour of China.²⁸ The threat of war from Japan cast a shadow over China but despite ominous signs things were relatively peaceful for her 1936/7 travels. She had a cine camera, made extensive notes and published her account in 1938 as *Brave New China* and in the light of events made a few additions in 1940. Where possible she stayed with Chinese friends.

On the way she was invited to edit a new edition of her father's translation of Confucius' *Analects* and after thinking Confucius dull and prosy she was captivated by him. She made a pilgrimage to Confucius' birthplace and home, spoke at Tsinan University on the wit, wisdom and courage of Confucius, saw other Confucian sites, climbed sacred mountains and wrote a thirty three page introduction for the World's Classics edition of the *Analects*: 'It has been a searching privilege... to listen to this great scholar and gentleman discourse on life and social responsibilities, on Sincerity and Virtue.'²⁹ Confucius was largely eclipsed for the next few decades but she would have been delighted that although 'Reviled as late as the 1970s, in the 1990s Confucius had been rehabilitated.'³⁰

At Tientsin, at the request of male college students, she spoke 'on the attitude of Christ to Woman'³¹ She had to change a planned talk on Confucius but her 1932 address and theme for the Free Churches Women gave a good start. She was asked to speak on the subject all over China and expanded and systemised her thoughts a decade later. She visited Ginling College and made sure to mention its female President, Dr Wu I-Fang, Chair of the National Christian Council. Dorothea, mindful of the place of women in

²⁶ *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung*, p. 44.

²⁷ W.E. Soothill's Preface to *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1937.

²⁸ *BNC* (1940), p. 220.

²⁹ *The Analects of Confucius* translated by W.E. Soothill, edited with an Introduction by Lady Dorothea Hosie, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. xlvii.

³⁰ Keay, John (2010-04-12). *China: A History* (p. 518). HarperCollins Publishers. Kindle Edition.

³¹ *BNC*, p. 78.

England, remarked, 'It is as if a combined assembly of the Episcopalian and the Free Churches in England had elected a woman to preside over them.'³²

After her father's death Dorothea had resolved to visit Wenzhou and her cousin Margaret Farrar who had joined her by then agreed to accompany her. They arrived on Christmas Day and found the city church filled with about 1000 worshippers. Having been asked to speak she sat by the pulpit and reflected on her year. She had grown up in 'the assured world of Victorian days'³³ but now everything was criticised including 'the very foundation of love and reason'³⁴ so she wondered what remained. She realised that 'Good work counts' whether by Confucius, in education or in the church which despite everything had grown. She spoke briefly and they sang her father's favourite hymn. Chiang Kai Shek's baptism as a Christian in October 1930 impressed the Christian world greatly³⁵ and in the face of rising communism he was likely to find support from Christians and Dorothea was clearly in that camp. A photo of Chiang and his wife formed the Frontispiece of *Brave New China* and chapter 23 'Resolute Rock' was about the Generalissimo and his wife. Dorothea accepted that he had blood on his hands but she was hopeful because all around the country people were being taught social conscience, cleanliness and comradeship and peace and progress instead of war. She could see signs of Confucius in him and liked the portrayal of New Life Movement maxims (which promoted Confucian values) all over the country.

Brampton Down

The expected Japanese attack came in July 1937 and news of refugees and casualties reached the west. Lady Hosie joined in an October appeal.³⁶ Madame Chiang cabled her with news of the carnage and appealed for medical supplies³⁷ and Dorothea went around the country lecturing 'on behalf of the China Relief Funds'.³⁸

By November 1937 Dorothea was at Brampton Down School, Folkestone, because 'finding me distracted with calls to speak for China relief, Miss Starkey offered me Madame's bedroom and study.'³⁹ This enabled her to complete *Brave New China*. She wrote graphically of the destruction that afflicted China after she had left and in a 1940 Postscript said she nearly did not write the book; 'It seemed too much a Book of Remembrance, a vase of spikenard poured out of a token of a crucifixion.'⁴⁰ Yet as crucifixion was once followed by resurrection she trusted that she had described a China

³² *BNC*, p. 264.

³³ *BNC*, p. 226.

³⁴ *BNC*, p. 226.

³⁵ Smith, Edwin W., *Dust of Gold*, London, British and Foreign Bible Society, 1931, p. 30f.

³⁶ *The Times*, 1 & 2 October 1937.

³⁷ *BNC*, p. 276.

³⁸ *Jesus and Woman*, 1956, opposite dedication page.

³⁹ See Lady Hosie, 'How I come into the Story' in *B.D.*, *Golden Jubilee Booklet*, p. 33.

⁴⁰ *BNC*, p. 288.

struggling for a better future. China's struggle for such a better future was destined to continue for the rest of the twentieth century and with notable tragic setbacks.

After completing the book in July 1938 she joined the teaching staff. The following year the school was evacuated to Henlade House near Taunton in Somerset for the rest of the war. She became vice Principal and as well as administrative work and teaching French⁴¹ and English wrote two more books; *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung* (1944) and *Jesus and Woman* (1946). *Pool* was about her time in China with her friends Miss Way and Miss (Blossom) Lo in 1936.

She was an inspiring and exciting teacher. As well as her love for China 'Her energy, her enthusiasm for beautiful things and great causes, her idealism tempered with charity, these found a response in young minds and hearts... One learned adventurously... not with the intelligence alone, but with the whole personality.'⁴² Locally in Somerset she promoted relief for China and, in January 1944, to thank local women for their compassionate generosity spoke at a Women's Institute meeting. She explained that Britain owed much to China including as headings for her lecture (probably given in many places), silk, paper, tea and porcelain.

The second book written in Somerset, *Jesus and Woman*, was prompted by the discussions in China a decade earlier and was published in 1946. She observed that in the Western world 'man' meant 'humankind' but considered that, as it is now, a questionable assumption and pointed out that in many other cultures 'man' would not include women. She used Galatians 3:26, 28 as a key inclusive text which she argued could only stem from Jesus himself. She accepted that Jesus' followers have not easily or quickly learnt from him and, boldly (for 1946), suggested that Father-Mother or One Parent was a better way of expressing Jesus' meaning in the Lord's Prayer.⁴³ She went through the four gospels to illustrate Jesus' attitude to women with occasional references to her experiences in China and elsewhere and showed that with a little imagination the otherwise hidden women in the stories can be revealed. The Chinese Yin-Yang symbol which she considered was a good way of explaining the complementarity of the sexes was printed on the cover.

The book was well received and the American Methodist Women's Division of Spiritual Service produced a study version as their Book of the Year for 1954-55. It was much shorter than the 1946 edition and approached the subject thematically under the title *The*

⁴¹ Lady Hosie, 'How I come into the Story' in *B.D.*, *Golden Jubilee Booklet*, 34. Also p. 29.

⁴² Ann Maltby in Peto, Meliora, *Brampton Down, Folkestone, Golden Jubilee, 1904-54*, p. 29.

⁴³ *Jesus and Woman*, 1946, p. 54.

Master Calleth for Thee and with 130, 000 copies sold was a ‘best-seller’.⁴⁴ The original title was restored for the 1956 British edition.

The school returned to Folkestone at the end of the war and Lady Hosie and Miss Starkey retired at the end of the 1946 school year. They settled at Appletree Cottage, Redlynch, about eight miles from Salisbury. Dorothea attended Woodfalls Methodist Church in the Salisbury Circuit where she was remembered ‘as a gracious, kindly lady whose presence at the Sunday morning services at our Woodfalls church is a source of strength and encouragement’.⁴⁵ She continued in the Faith and Order Committee as one of three women in a membership of thirty three,⁴⁶ was involved in efforts for relief and assessing refugee issues after the war⁴⁷ and was active in the Committee for the Reunion of the Churches.⁴⁸

Lady Dorothea Hosie died at Salisbury hospital on 15 February 1959 at the age of 73.

Assessment.

Lady Hosie is occasionally mentioned in connection with China in the first half of the twentieth century. She helped her husband and father with their publications but she had an independent life and reputation as an informed writer and speaker on China. Her books were framed in the form of conversations with friends and people she met on her travels. The result was not abstract analysis and reflection but expressed in terms of relationships and interpersonal transactions. She had an optimistic outlook so looked on the best side of those she admired and supported.⁴⁹ She did all she could for China, was highly regarded in Methodism and the Free Churches and her reputation extended to North America. Her quiet promotion of the cause of women in China and in the Methodist and other Protestant churches was probably in advance of that prevailing in those circles in her era. Above all, she was willing to learn from China.

⁴⁴ *Jesus and Woman*, 1956, back cover.

⁴⁵ ‘Circuit Personalities’, article about Lady Hosie from Salisbury Circuit Life Magazine March 1950, p 19.

⁴⁶ *Methodist Church Minutes of Conference*, 1950, p. 46. Her relation, Sister Dorothy Farrar, also from Halifax was also member of this Committee.

⁴⁷ For example, ‘Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service – a committee to consider and report upon the responsibilities of Methodism in respect to the refugee problem, including inter-church action, the continuance of assistance by British Methodism to Methodist churches in those countries where the refugee problem is acute, and other factors involved.’ *Methodist Church Minutes of Conference*, 1950, p. 47.

⁴⁸ *Jesus and Woman*, 1956, opposite dedication page. I’m not quite sure what that committee was.

⁴⁹ See Snow, Helen Foster, *My China Years*, London: Harrap, 1985 for dismissive opinions of Chiang and Confucius.

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