

## **Hannah R. Hurnard: From Wayfarer in the Land to New Age** **Kai Kjær-Hansen, International Coordinator of LCJE**

### ***High Leigh 1951***

Yesterday I let Miss Ruth Clark speak to us from CMJ's Summer School here at High Leigh in 1951. Miss Hannah R. Hurnard also participated that year. The two of them had shared the same house and the same fate together with the young clergyman Ronald Adeney on the ground of CMJ's hospital in West Jerusalem during the turmoil in Jerusalem in connection with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Hannah Hurnard's contribution at High Leigh in 1951 was entitled: "The Challenges of the Villages of Israel".

In 1951 Hannah Hurnard was stationed in Tiberias, and as an evangelist she is busy sharing the gospel with Jews and Arabs. Her book *Wayfarer in the Land* had been published in April 1951. In this she tells about her evangelistic work in Jewish settlements and Arab villages from 1936 and some years onwards.

But this is not her first book. In 1950 CMJ had published her book *Watchmen on the Walls*. In this book she describes the tumultuous time in Jerusalem from November 1947 till the end of October 1948. Many missionaries left Palestine in the period leading up to the establishment of the State of Israel. A minority stayed behind, among them Hannah Hurnard. She played an active role in the so-called "Operation Mercy", where some Hebrew Christians whose lives were at stake – as it was understood at the time – are evacuated from Palestine in early May 1948.

In retrospect there is not unanimous agreement about "Operation Mercy". I do not think Hannah Hurnard regretted that she had been part of this action. Here at High Leigh in 1951 she mentions, however, that it is a problem that Hebrew Christians wish to leave the country because they "are deemed to have lost their Zionist ideas". She herself has a different view: "It is better for Israel that these Hebrew Christians remain there to give their witness. I ask you to pray about this matter."

### **Wayfarer in the Land**

Hannah Hurnard was born into a relatively wealthy Quaker family in 1905. Religious belief was not a high priority for her in her teenage years. She had a religious breakthrough in 1924 at a convention at Keswick, and for some years she worked with the Friends' Evangelistic Band, now the Fellowship for Evangelising Britain's Villages (FEBV).

In 1932 she came to Palestine, where she, among other things, lent a hand in Dr Churcher's clinic in Haifa and taught English. The British Jews Society – now Christian Witness to Israel (CWI) – was behind this work. Shortly before she went on leave in England in 1936, she told Dr Churcher that when she returned to Palestine, she would to take up evangelistic work in the Jewish settlements.

When she returns to Palestine in the autumn of 1936, she brings a small Austin, a "baby Austin" as she calls the car. It was a gift from her father to be used in the village work. She sees Jesus as the Wayfarer proper. He sent out his disciples in twos. She maps the area and allies herself with other missionaries who share her visions. Those who work with her are primarily young women who for some time can be released from their duties at their mission stations. She does not criticize the work done there, but she points out that many will never get in touch with the gospel through the mission stations. They need to be reached with the gospel where they are.

In the “Baby Austin” Hannah Hurnard tours the country –beginning in Galilee, accompanied by another female missionary. They want to distribute Bibles and other Christian literature but not least: they want to witness about Israel’s true Wayfarer, Jesus. The goal is first of all to reach the lost of Israel’s house. But the work is soon extended to include Arab villages where, as it is said, “the Wayfarer’s other sheep” are. She does not take many steps without first having brought the matter to the Lord in prayer. Phrases like “The Lord seemed to say” and “it seemed to me the Lord said”, etc., are characteristic of her. She appreciates cooperation with missionaries from other denominations: “Perhaps nothing so unites people of varying temperament and outlook,” she writes, “as sharing together in this work of going out to seek the lost sheep”.

At first the female Wayfarers did not dare to introduce themselves as missionaries when they came to a Jewish settlement. They feared that if they did so, they would be turned away before they got an opportunity to share the gospel. But a certain experience in a kibbutz changed that. They had been welcomed very kindly by a person who invited them to eat with them in the communal dining room. After the meal they were given a guided tour of the kibbutz. Only then did they reveal that they were missionaries, and they asked if they could leave some Christian literature. “He accepted the New Testament in rather a surly manner and left abruptly, and that was all we managed to leave in that place,” Hannah Hurnard writes. They left the kibbutz ashamed that they had accepted hospitality under false pretences.

After this experience the Wayfarers decided to acknowledge openly who they were when they came to a Jewish settlement. Yes, we are missionaries with an important message. May we tell you about it, please.

And yes, there were those who as soon as they heard the name of Jesus would spit and say: “May his name be blotted out ... An imposter! A blasphemer! May His memory be forgotten.”

And yes, there was one who accepted a New Testament, went away and returned a moment later with, as she writes, “a long handled shovel on which were burning coals, and the little Testament, already in flames lying on the top. He held it out in front of us, and we stood silently watching the Book which might have brought him the message of Life, flaming and crackling and falling into ashes ... ‘There goes the record of your Jesus,’ he flung at us through clenched teeth ... ‘I hate him ... I hate him.’”

But they often experienced something quite different when they first introduced themselves as missionaries. It opened “nearly always”, says Hannah Hurnard, “for a free discussion of the matter which we felt so important.” It even happened that some welcomed them heartily with the remark: “I was a patient in such and such a Mission hospital’ or “I went to a Mission school.”

There is no doubt: Both through her contribution at High Leigh in 1951 and through her book *Wayfarer in the Land* she looks upon herself as a wayfarer, involved in “direct evangelism”. She knows that there are sagacious people who think that direct evangelism do more damage than good. She does not agree. She accepts that there are people with a strong focus on theology and missiology, which is also necessary. “But,” as she puts it so beautifully in the preface to *Wayfarer in the Land*, “it is one of the lovely things about the Master we serve, that He is so willing to use in His service, dwarfs as well as giants, and “feeble folk” as well as champions. Nor in this is there any doubt: Hannah Hurnard sees herself as a “dwarf”, not a “giant”, she includes herself among the “feeble folk”, not among the “champions”.

Hannah Hurnard experienced the siege of Jerusalem in 1948 at close quarters. Here is a brief summary of what she experienced on Easter Sunday. It gives us a good picture of her faith and trust in the crucified and risen Jesus at the end of the 1940's.

### **Easter Sunday, Monday and Tuesday 1948**

In the morning of Easter Sunday 1948 there was spasmodic shooting in the area. But Hannah Hurnard and Ruth Clarke nevertheless walked, at 6:00 in the morning, from the English mission compound on Prophets Street to the Garden Tomb in order to pray. "A little peach tree was radiant with blossoms," she writes. "It was mild and sunny, and I listened to him speaking about 'the power of his resurrection' as I sat there for an hour near the hill, perhaps the one on which he died." Before they return for Communion in the mission compound she goes into the tomb where she kneels. She continues:

At that movement there was a heavy shell explosion near at hand, but in the rock cave it sounded muffled and unreal. The caretaker and his wife told us that all night long that area has been shelled, and they have taken shelter in the tomb. What a contrast it seemed. Destruction and death all night, and Easter morning with his message of victory over death. (56)

On that same Easter morning Mildred Marston, teacher at the Girl's College in Jerusalem, went with a colleague to the midmorning service at St. George's Cathedral. While they are walking along St. Paul's Road there is a sudden burst of shooting. Mildred was hit by a sniper's bullet and died while her companion had thrown herself on the ground and was unhurt.

Hannah writes these moving words on Mildred Marston's death:

Amid the sorrow there was comfort in the thought that she began this Easter Day in the earthly Jerusalem and finished it in the heavenly one with the multitudes of the redeemed who worship and adore him for the life that is forever and who share in the power of his resurrection. (56-57)

Mildred Marston was buried the next day, Monday, at the Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion. Present at the funeral were, among others, Miss Thomson, a British welfare officer. The next day, Tuesday, she was also shot – and was buried beside Mildred.

### **Hinds' Feet on High Places**

In 1955 Hannah Hurnard wrote the book *Hinds' Feet on High Places*. The title is inspired by the concluding words in Habakkuk's Book: "The Lord God is my strength, who makes my feet nimble as a hind's and sets me to range the heights (Hab 3:19). It is an allegory, reminiscent of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Much-Afraid, one of the major characters, lives with the clan of Fearfuls in the Valley of Humiliation. The Good Shepherd offers Much-Afraid escape from the Valley and with that also an escape from her impending wedding to a loathsome cousin. The Good Shepherd will take her on a journey to the Kingdom of Love at the top of the mountains. Much-Afraid accepts the invitation, and we accompany her on her spiritual journey through difficult places together with her two companions, Sorrow and Suffering. The Good Shepherd then leads Much-Afraid to his kingdom of Love at the top of the mountains.

*Hinds' Feet on High Places* was considered mainstream evangelical, and there are plenty of testimonies about the blessing it has brought.

Here we could end the story of Hannah R. Hurnard. Few, if any, who have spoken here at High Leigh on Jewish evangelism have written a book with so many readers.

The beautiful memory of Hannah Hurnard is intact in 1998, eight years after her death, when CMJ reissues her book *Watchmen on the Walls* in connection with the celebration of the State of Israel's 50th anniversary. The foreword is written by John Wood, who concludes with these words:

For Hannah, the future included life as a world traveler; enlisting intercessors for Israel in Central America, Switzerland, UK, and Australasia; and becoming the celebrated writer of several best-sellers, starting with *Watchmen on the Walls*, which was first published by CMJ in 1950.

Sadly enough there is more to be said about Hannah Hurnard's subsequent life than this.

### **From High Leigh via High Places to New Age**

Hannah was, as mentioned earlier, born in 1905 and she died in 1990. When she stood on the platform here at High Leigh in 1951, she was in the middle of her life. How did it end?

She wrote a number of books in which she more and more moves away from evangelical belief. I will only mention a couple of examples. Her biographer, Isabel Anders, has these observations:

The view that she [Hannah Hurnard] sets forth is one of universalism, or a belief that *all will be saved in the end*. This was an understanding that caused Hannah to reconsider all of her early evangelical zeal, as well as look with new eyes at the meaning of life and death.

In her later years Hannah Hurnard engages herself with occultism, reincarnation and New Age ideology. Isabel Anders states: "Before her death, her home had been open every Monday evening for those who came to hear her share her form of strict vegetarianism, reincarnation and New Age thought." And Isabel Anders continues:

In fact, in the later years of her life, Hannah herself ceased to attend church. Her lifelong conviction that God would speak to her personally, giving her deeper and deeper insight and "light" that was to be widely shared with others, led her to believe that there could be no spiritual authority over her or her speaking and writing except the Lord Christ himself.

G. Richard Fisher, from Personal Freedom Outreach, gives the following evaluation of Hannah Hurnard's writings in the article "From High Places to Heresy". Hannah Hurnard's life resembles, according to Fisher "the tragic figure of King Saul, starting right and ending wrong". Against that background Fisher gives the following advice:

We must stay in the highlands of our Bible. We must stay in the heights of sound theology and proper discernment. What a tragedy that one woman could start so high and end so low and influence so many so negatively.

Samson started in the “high places” of the rolling hillside of the Shephalah but tragically ended in the lowlands of the Philistines. The sacrifices he made, bit by bit, robbed him of God’s blessing and leading. Those “sad ending” stories do parallel the tragedy of any who start well but do not finish that way.

None of us who are present here at High Leigh in 2011, where Hannah Hurnard 60 years ago inspired the audience to direct evangelism, can consider ourselves outside the danger zone. Therefore it is extremely important that leaders show concern for leaders and that the sheep are not afraid to bleat if their leader begins to act as *the Shepherd* or to claim to be directly connected with the Lord Jesus himself.

Hannah Hurnard’s book *The Inner Man* was published posthumously in 1993 as a Sun Book; Sun Publishing is known for its many New Age titles. The title *The Inner Man* ought to put us on our guard, for The Inner Man – or Woman – in us can fool us. Therefore: We need the Scripture. We need the Holy Spirit. We need each other for mutual correction. May God in his grace help each and every one of us so that our life does not become a “sad ending” story, where we under the guise of piety listen more to ourselves than to what God has revealed clearly in the Holy Scriptures and where we with a “God has told *me*” on our lips have stopped listening to what other believers think and what God may have told *them*.

### Select bibliography

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*Other books* by Hannah Hurnard (not quoted here) may be found by googling *Hannah Hurnard*. On “Operation Mercy”, see *Mishkan* (Issue 61, 2009).

*Acknowledgment*: My description of Hannah Hurnard’s development from Christian faith to New Age ideology relies heavily on the above-mentioned article by G. Richard Fisher.

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