

The Foreign Devil Who Baked Virginia Tea Cakes: The Irrepressible Lottie Moon

John A. Broadus called Charlotte (Lottie) Diggs Moon “the most educated woman in the South.” She came from a wealthy family, had a successful career in education and was rumored to have an offer of marriage from one of her professors. So how did this four-foot, three-inch Civil-War era Southern belle find herself alone in inland China, three days’ journey from any other English-speaking person, baking Virginia tea cakes for children who called her a “foreign devil”?

Lottie Moon said she heard the call to missions “as clear as a bell” during a sermon by her pastor. After receiving her appointment from the Southern Baptist Mission Board, she closed the school where she was co-principal and joined her sister Edmonia in China. Edmonia was one of the first single women to be appointed to the mission field and had been serving in Tengchow about a year when Lottie arrived in 1873. Together, the women began a school for girls in the city. It was rough going at first. The Chinese people distrusted and felt superior to Americans. And truth be told, Lottie and Edmonia had some prejudices against the “Chinese heathen” as well.



But as Lottie grew to know the people of China, she grew to genuinely love and appreciate them. She found beauty in their culture and eventually accepted many of their customs and their style of dress, though never compromising her beliefs in areas of religion. Later in life she would say, “It is comparatively easy to give oneself to mission work, but it is not easy to give oneself to an alien people. Yet, the latter is much better and truer work than the former. It includes the former and goes beyond it. It is the difference between the letter and the Spirit.”

As the Spirit-enabled Lottie grew to love the people of China, she became overwhelmed with the great need of the millions across the country to hear the Gospel. Only a handful of missionaries were available to teach them, and those missionaries routinely worked themselves into an early grave under the staggering responsibility of reaching an entire country for Christ. Of the eight sent to China in the 15 years after Lottie arrived, three died, three returned home in broken health, one left the faith, and only one remained on the field. Even her beloved Edmonia was forced to return to Virginia, broken and exhausted.

Lottie was aware of the intrinsic rigors of the life she had chosen, but insisted that the people back home could make life much easier for those serving on the field. She began a letter-writing campaign to raise funds for missions, to recruit more men and single women missionaries and to change mission board policy. She would continue writing these letters for the rest of her life.

Lottie believed that the more she asked for, the more she would get, and so she asked over and over. In one letter to Virginia Baptists, she challenged the men, saying, “I

write to call your attention to the fact that Virginia has only one representative in all China, and that one a woman What are you going to do, yourselves and in person?” When money was slow in coming, she wrote to chide her mission board, “In times of famine and revolution, one sometimes feels the need of money more than usually.” She motivated Baptist women by showing them what Methodist women were doing in fundraising and in sending out single women missionaries. Her letters vividly describing the famine in China raised money for relief, and her straightforward letters to the mission board explaining the desperate need of regular furloughs influenced policy.

In 1885, Lottie moved from the mission in Tengchow to P'ingtu, a village about 120 miles inland. Lottie was armed only with her trusty umbrella, which she used effectively as a weapon on more than one occasion. Her new assignment was a three day journey from her friends and from any government protection. She knew she would be lonely in P'ingtu, but looked forward to her time there. She had a growing hunger to know and rely on God more fully. She wrote, “I feel my weakness and inability to accomplish anything without the aid of the Holy Spirit.” She knew that if the Gospel were to succeed in P'ingtu, it would be only as God enabled her to teach and the people to understand.

It was in P'ingtu that Lottie first began to dress in Chinese clothing and where she began baking her Virginia tea cakes to give to the neighborhood children. At first the children didn't trust the “foreign devil” and refused the cookies, but eventually they accepted them, and her. Through the children, Lottie gained entrance into neighborhood homes. Soon she was teaching and visiting from sunup to sundown. Often she would be inside a home teaching women, and the men would gather outside the windows to listen to her speak. She wrote, “I am trying honestly to do the work that could fill the hands of three or four women, and in addition must do the work that ought to be done by young men.”

Lottie insisted on regular times of rest—15 minutes at lunch time and a month off in the summer—to recover her strength from the constant demands in P'ingtu. But her steady labor was blessed by God. Men did eventually come to lead worship and to baptize the new converts. Native churches were established and by 1912, over 2,000 converts had been baptized in the area. Lottie became the surrogate mother of the mission, and helped train new missionaries in the language and customs of China.

Lottie said, “I have a firm conviction that I am immortal until my work is done.” It was finished on December 24, 1912. Her last words were a verse from the children's song she'd taught thousands of times. She repeated it over and over, “We are weak but He is strong.”

Quotes from this article are taken from *The New Lottie Moon Story* by Catherine B. Allen and *Send the Light: Lottie Moon's letters and Other Writings*, edited by Keith Harper.

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