

# Hare, Eric Burnham (1894–1982) and Agnes (Fulton) (1893–1983)

## LESTER DEVINE

Originally trained as a secondary history teacher, a career long Adventist educator, Lester Devine, Ed.D., has taught at elementary, secondary and higher education levels and spent more than three decades in elected educational leadership positions in two divisions of the world Church, NAD (1969-1982) and SPD (1982-2005). He completed his forty years of denominational service with a term as director of the Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre at Avondale University College in Australia where his life-long hobby of learning and presenting on Adventist heritage issues became his vocation.

Eric B. Hare is well known for his stories from his missionary work in Burma from 1915 to 1934, and he served in the Sabbath School Department at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists from 1946 to 1962.

## Early Life and Education

Eric Burnham Hare was the second son of Pastor Robert and Henrietta Hare, born in Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia, on October 12, 1894.<sup>1</sup> His early education was at the Fitzroy School in Melbourne, and there he formed lifelong friendships, in particular with Roy Allan Anderson, who too would later make an enormous contribution to the work of the Church internationally as an evangelist.<sup>2</sup>

Eric Hare graduated from the missionary course at Avondale in 1911 and the biblical-academic course in 1913.<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 1911 he began his denominational service as tentmaster for E. B. Rudge and Harold Lukens in Port Pirie, South Australia. "Brother Rudge and Brother Lukens did the preaching, and I gave the Bible studies," he said later. "All I had to do was to sweep and dust the tent, distribute the handbills, play the organ, and lead the music."<sup>4</sup> At the end of 1913 he was appointed to work in the Victoria Tasmania Conference<sup>5</sup> and joined J. W. Kent and J. H. Woods conducting a tent evangelistic campaign in Richmond.<sup>6</sup> By June 2014 he was at the Sydney Sanitarium, enrolled in the nursing course.<sup>7</sup> Just one year later at a special session of the Australasian Union Conference Committee held June 8–22, 1915, he was appointed as a missionary to Burma.<sup>8</sup>

On June 24, just a few days after the completion of the union council at which he had received his appointment to Burma, Eric married Agnes Fulton, daughter of the pioneer missionaries to the South Pacific and Asia, Pastor and Mrs. J. E. Fulton.<sup>9</sup> Agnes had been born in Bishop, California, on November 9, 1893.<sup>10</sup> Before leaving for Burma, Eric continued with his nursing course at the Sydney Sanitarium. Agnes also took a nursing course for three months.<sup>11</sup>

## Missionary

The couple left Sydney on Thursday, September 23, 1915.<sup>12</sup> After they arrived in Burma, their first two years were taken up with language study and the beginnings of their health work. Eric and Agnes proved to have an aptitude for language, both receiving more than 90 percent in their Karen examinations. In fact, the examiner told Eric that he had received the highest marks of any missionary that he had ever examined.<sup>13</sup>

A gifted musician, Eric soon established a brass band, which was a considerable novelty, attracting the interest of the



Eric and Agnes Hare  
Photo courtesy of Lester Devine.

people.<sup>14</sup> Hare had visited churches across Australia and New Zealand, collecting brass instruments for the band.<sup>15</sup> He used the band to create opportunities for evangelism and community building.<sup>16</sup>

While Eric and Agnes were in Burma, five children were born into the family. Their first child, Rosalind Agnes, died on June 23, 1917, just 19 days after her birth, and was buried in the Protestant cemetery, Rangoon, Burma.<sup>17</sup> Shortly afterward they were visited by Agnes' parents, Pastor and Mrs. John E. Fulton, and their daughter Jesse. Fulton was at that time the president of the Southern Asia Division. The Hares were located on the Salween River at Kamamaung in North Eastern Burma, close to the border with Siam (Thailand). Fulton described the isolation of the mission station:

The thick jungle abounds in wild animals. Last night we could hear the monkeys in one part and the little barking deer in another. Every night fires are kept burning in the shed or the mission bullockpen [check word—bullock pen?] to keep the tigers away. Tiger tracks are sometimes seen right through the mission ground, and even under the house.<sup>18</sup>

The early years in Burma were very difficult. The division secretary-treasurer, C. L. Torrey, wrote after visiting the mission station in 1934:

Brother Hare reviewed to us the early beginnings of his work, and recalled how discouraged he became during the first three years of his labours at Kamamaung and in the outlying districts, struggling along during this time without a single baptism. He baptised his first convert the following year. After that the number increased year by year.<sup>19</sup>

In 1919, at the division meeting in Ranchi, India, Eric Hare was ordained to the gospel ministry. Taking part in the service was Pastor J. E. Fulton, still president of the Southern Asia Division.<sup>20</sup> Their continuing service saw Pastor and Mrs. Hare using the training they had received at the Sydney Sanitarium. Along with Harold and Dorothy Baird, they established a number of dispensaries serving the Karen people.<sup>21</sup>

Four more children were born into the Hare family while they were in Burma: Eileen Nita (later Mrs. Ivan Higgins), Leonard, Verna Mae, and Peter.<sup>22</sup> Eric and Agnes Hare and their children continued their outreach to the Karen until 1934, when, after more than 18 years on the banks of the Salween River, they were invited to relocate to the Northern California Conference in the United States of America, where Hare was appointed as the Missionary Volunteer and Sabbath School secretary.<sup>23</sup> The transfer provided a much-needed opportunity for their youngest daughter, Verna Mae, to receive assistance for her severe hearing deficiency.<sup>24</sup> They departed from Burma on April 12, 1934,<sup>25</sup> leaving behind an established church with a membership of 122 and eight Sabbath Schools with a membership of 340.<sup>26</sup>

After some years in San Francisco, Eric was appointed as the Sabbath School secretary of the Southern California Conference in Glendale, California,<sup>27</sup> a position he held for a short time before accepting an invitation to return to Burma in 1941.<sup>28</sup> Eric and Agnes Hare continued their pioneering work for the Karen people, this time in Rangoon, until the Japanese bombing in 1942 forced their evacuation.<sup>29</sup> Eric recounted the miraculous story of their evacuation from Burma.<sup>30</sup> Having been evacuated to India by steamer from Burma, Agnes and the children waited there for Eric's evacuation. During this time Eric Hare and some of his fellow workers made a hazardous journey to safety overland, and after many dangers and miraculous escapes he was eventually able to rejoin his wife and children, and the family returned to America.<sup>31</sup>

Back in America, Eric Hare was once again called to head the Youth Department of the Southern California Conference, and then the Sabbath School Department at the Pacific Union Conference, until in 1946, at the General Conference session, when he was called to serve as an associate secretary of the Sabbath School Department at the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>32</sup> Shortly after Eric took this appointment, Eileen, their eldest daughter, died in a road accident at Van Horne, Texas. She; her husband, Ivan Higgins; and their two daughters were on furlough from their appointment in India when the accident occurred.<sup>33</sup>

While holding his responsibilities at the General Conference, Hare gave specific attention to the role of the Sabbath School in child development and spirituality. His work was a forerunner of the Children's Ministries Department. His work was well received, as illustrated by an extensive visit to the Australasian Union Conference territories, arriving in August 1951.<sup>34</sup>

Eric Hare continued his work at the General Conference until his retirement in 1962.<sup>35</sup> Eric Hare's life came to an end in Washington, D.C., on June 1, 1982.<sup>36</sup> Agnes lived on for nearly a year until April 25, 1983, when she died in Berrien Springs, Michigan.<sup>37</sup>

## Legacy

Well known all over the world for his remarkable ability to tell character-building stories to small children, Eric B. Hare wrote 13 books and wrote and recorded hundreds of articles and stories for children.

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