

## **"BY FAITH"**

Henry W. Frost and  
the China Inland Mission

by Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor

By THE CHINA INLAND MISSION, PHILADELPHIA

### **Chapter One -**

#### **THE OPENING STORY**

**"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for"** (Hebrews 11:1)

"The life of faith is the life that uses the Lord."

- HANDLEY MOULE of Durham

IT WAS IN THE DAYS when America was waking up to the vastness of her natural resources that Mahlon S. Frost became interested in the discovery and production of oil in western Pennsylvania. He came, far back, of a Danish family which had taken root in Cambridge, England, where they founded and endowed a hospital which, at the time of the Reformation, became the well-known St. John's College. Strange to say, Edmund Frost, who brought the name to this country, gravitated to Cambridge, near Boston, where he purchased property and became one of the founders of Harvard University. Mahlon Frost's young wife (nee Frances Harriet Foster) came of stock very similar to his own. Descended from a long line of Flemish and English Knights, her forebears, like the Frosts, had emigrated to America shortly after the sailing of the Mayflower and settled in Massachusetts. Strong, alert, and full of initiative, Mahlon Frost moved with the times, and strenuous times they were, with "the nation growing like a weed" and apparently no limit to the possibilities of development. He more than once made and lost what was then great wealth, and in spite of reverses was reckoned among the ablest financiers in the East, carrying always "the white flower of a blameless life," for he was first and above all a devoted Christian.

The younger of his sons, Henry Weston Frost, was born in 1858, when the parents were living in Detroit, near the Great Lakes. There had been a daughter, a specially lovely child, but shortly before Henry's birth she passed away after a brief illness, and the mother's grief was so poignant that he came into the world with a tendency to sadness of spirit. Life, however, was full of movement and interest. The brother, six years his senior, was a stirring companion, and their father's business activities led to frequent changes of scene as well as of fortune.

Through it all, the dark-haired little mother kept the atmosphere of home about them. She was unusually attractive in appearance and had a lovely voice. The father too was a singer. It was as members of the same church choir that they had first met, and their love of music was handed on to the second son. Among his earliest recollections is the sweetness of his mother's voice, as he sat on her knee as she told him Bible stories, or sang his favorite hymns.

There was not much discipline in those early years, though there were helpful spiritual influences that bore fruit in after life. The Bible teaching in a Brooklyn Sunday School awakened reverence for the Word of GOD and to some extent met the longing of the child-heart, so often unsuspected because unexpressed. But it was in home associations that the boy found most to confirm his faith.

"The lives of my parents compelled me to believe that the Word of GOD is wholly true and also that there is a living CHRIST. My father's gentleness, his long-suffering patience, his ennobling companionship, and my mother's unfaltering, never-failing sweetness and love won my heart, not only for themselves but also for GOD . . . If I may judge from my own experience, parental life with a child counts more than preaching, and parental sympathy more than exhortation."

School life, begun in Stamford, Connecticut, was continued in Chicago, amid the free and stimulating influences of the Middle West. Agriculture was prosperous, save in the South. Great trunk railways were being engineered across the continent and fabulous fortunes acquired in mine and factory and business.\*

Mahlon Frost's genius for finance found full play amid such opportunities. Though he had lost heavily in Brooklyn, through the dishonesty of a man he trusted, a year or two in Chicago enabled him to return East and establish a home again with every comfort.

To this period belonged, perhaps, the happiest days in the life of his children, for in addition to good schools, the suburbs of the city in which they settled afforded country-like surroundings. Spreading lawns about the house and a sparkling stream in the meadow beyond were a perennial delight.

More than this, about a mile away, there was an inlet of Long Island Sound, with a swimming pool, a sand bar offshore, and great neighboring docks and sheds. Oh, the long summer days of unalloyed bliss - playing in the meadow, building dams in the brook, swimming and rowing at the inlet, and watching the white-winged ships come and go! Winter too had its joys. There were snowfalls in those days that were real ones, when we were snowed in and had to dig ourselves out, and could build houses with mysterious tunnels leading to them, wherein we played Eskimos, until our fire melted the house and brought it and our visions to a sudden end.

\*See *The Epic of America*, by James Truslow Adams, p. 277.

The next move was to a stately home in New York, at the corner of Madison Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street, where the boys found themselves launched on the full tide of city life. They attended a famous school, the Charlier Institute, where French was spoken all day long, and found in the park-like enclosure of Madison Square plenty of enjoyment for leisure hours. Another favorite haunt was Booth's Theater, a high-class playhouse not far away. The father of one of their schoolfellows was half-owner of the place, and supplied them with a pass which ensured many thrilling hours.

We were there when there were no plays, and when there were. We were sometimes before the scenes and at other times behind them. The "green room," the "red room," the "blue room," the "scene-painting room," and the "armory" were all familiar ground to us; and outside, we sat in

seats or boxes as we preferred. It was the halcyon time of theater life in New York City, for an honest attempt was being made, particularly in this Theater, to purify the drama and educate its patrons' taste. Hence, great and magnificent plays were produced, Shakespeare's masterpieces predominating. In this way we saw the theater at its best and met the most reputable players of the day, including Edwin Booth and Charlotte Cushman.

With their New York house, Mr. Frost had purchased a full-sized billiard table, thinking to make home the more attractive to his sons. This it certainly did, but it gave them also an intense love of the game, for they became almost expert players. It was not until Booth's Theater was closed, as a financial failure, and the Madison Avenue house had been given up that the danger connected with these pursuits became apparent.

"The time came when we moved again and had no billiard table in our home. Then, in spite of some compunctions of conscience, there was but one thing to do. I must go where the billiard tables were. And for many a day thereafter, I frequented places redolent with tobacco smoke, where stood bars patronized by men more often drunk than sober, and where profanity emphasized most of the conversation. At about twenty years of age I gave up billiard-playing, and have never since touched a cue . . .

"As it was with billiard-playing, so with theater-going. The time came when I could no longer go to Booth's Theater, and later I found myself in playhouses where conditions were anything but good. My last experience of this sort was in my college days, when I went to the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia. There I became so disgusted with the play, and especially with the ballet, that I rose up between the acts and went out, never to pass through a theater door again . . . As a result of my experience, I am constrained to express it as my conviction that the theater cannot be made a financial success except as it is made to appeal and minister to the baser passions."

Meanwhile, however, the boys enjoyed their city life, guarded by home influences that were helpful. Their father was in touch with the most spiritual movements of the day and loved to entertain ministers, missionaries, and others engaged in Christian service. Among the most welcome visitors to their New York home was a Scottish uncle by marriage, a graduate of Edinburgh in arts and theology, whom his nephews regarded with profound admiration. James Inglis was eminent both as a preacher and writer, but it was his accurate scholarship that was the wonder of the boys who, search as they might, could never find a word he could not define as well as spell correctly: The big Webster dictionary was often called to their help, but the word that would prove their uncle's Waterloo remained undiscovered.

Mr. Inglis was the center, at that time, of the remarkable group of teachers and preachers of various denominations whose informal meetings in his office and book room were the precursors of the Bible Conference movement of our day. It is no exaggeration to say that the Niagara Conference - first of such gatherings - had its inception in the stimulating fellowship of D. L. Moody, Major Whittle, A. J. Gordon, George C. Needham, James H. Brooks, and others, who loved to fgather in that New York office with one who contributed so much of mental culture and spiritual illumination.

But Mr. Inglis was above all a man of prayer, and this it was that made him a formative influence in the life of his younger nephew in the Frost home. He himself would have been the last to

suppose that, sixty years later, Mr. Henry W. Frost would write of him as "the uncle whose memory I have peculiarly revered and whose faith and works, though afar off, I have sought to follow." But it was upon this nephew, in large measure, that the mantle of James Inglis was to fall - the boy who, running into his room casually one day, was arrested to find him on his knees and to hear him earnestly praying for himself and his brother by name. Such impressions go deep in a young heart, and certainly they were needed at this time.

For when Harry was about thirteen it became necessary to dispose of the Madison Avenue property, and the family moved into the Gilsey House, one of the Apartment Hotels which were then becoming popular. There the boy entered upon what he afterwards felt to be the most critical period of his early life. Not being strong at the time, his attendance at school was irregular, and he missed his brother who was already promoted to college.

"For the first time (he wrote) we were shut up in a few small living rooms, took our meals in a public dining room, moved to and fro in crowds, and lived constantly in the midst of worldly surroundings . . . A boy's adaptability, however, is one of his strongest characteristics, and I speedily adjusted myself to the new conditions. The hall and elevator boys became my friends, the waiters, in spite of their august appearance, were soon regarded as familiars, and the excitement of public life became most attractive . . . There were the comers and goers at the hotel to be seen; there were games in the broad winding halls to be played . . . Moreover, there were the billiard room in the basement, the card-playing room next to it, and, connecting the two, the hotel bar - all of which were open to me as to others."

It can easily be seen why those days were critical for the boy who was left a good deal to himself.

Inwardly, he was far from happy. He had reached the age when young people become reserved with their elders, and was facing his problems very much alone. But there was One who perfectly understood, and who had provided a saving element just where it seemed most unlikely. For among the families resident in the hotel were some young girls whom Harry carefully avoided. Nothing could have been more unexpected than that, entrapped by his brother into meeting one of these, he should find in her the very friend he needed. Quiet and retiring, this little maiden lived very much apart from the influences about her. Her short white frocks and long braids of hair put her among children, but her inner experience was that of a happy and even mature Christian. She knew and loved the Lord JESUS and, as the boy soon discovered, was able to help him in his difficulties. How little passers-by realized what it was that engaged the thoughts and filled the conversation of these two, amid the distractions of that gay hotel! To the boy, drifting and unsatisfied, this gentle girl was like an angel from Heaven.

"Life to me, in those days, was big with perplexity, and I needed a friend who could see what I did not. We often found some quiet nook in the hotel and spent hours in talking seriously and even solemnly. And by this sacred influence, the spiritual life that had sadly declined was restored and saved . . . GOD, through my friend, Edith Butler, came into my life anew, and by His incoming cast out things that were contrary to His will. Thus the evils of my surroundings lost their hold upon me and, in the midst of them, I was kept."

It was a change for the better when, in the interest of his sons, Mr. Frost moved to Princeton, where the elder brother continued his university education. There Henry attended a preparatory

school and threw himself into the absorbing pursuits of organized athletics, especially baseball. He was fifteen by this time and found it none too soon to tackle higher mathematics, Latin, and Greek. Six years of school and college followed, brightened by delightful intercourse with a family of cousins, two boys and two girls, whose father, W. A. McCorkle, had married a sister of Mrs. Frost's. The two families were devoted to each other, and Dr. McCorkle's ministry in the Second Presbyterian Church in Princeton led, under GOD, to a moving episode in the life of the college.\*

For while the Frost boys were absorbed in school and college, their father became increasingly exercised about the spiritual condition of the student body of which they formed a part. He longed to bring to those hundreds of young men on the threshold of life some of the influences that were mightily stirring hearts through the preaching of D. L. Moody, Harry Moorehouse, and others. Mr. Frost had heard Moody for himself, and the evangelist had spoken highly of Moorehouse, who was from England. So it was with confidence he urged Dr. McCorkle to invite both the one and the other to Princeton, and arrange for meetings in his Church.

*\*Princeton did not become a university until 1896.*

Moorehouse came in 1874, and was entertained in the Frost home. The days that followed afforded a remarkable instance of how GOD loves to use "**the weak things of the world**" in accomplishing things that are mighty.

Moorehouse had been an inveterate gambler and even a pickpocket. He was uneducated and homely in appearance. And yet, saved and transformed through divine grace, he was a mighty power in convicting and saving others. The love of GOD was his theme, and he would preach night after night from John 3:16, pouring out fresh treasure all the time as from an inexhaustible store.

Dr. McCorkle's Church was filled to overflowing, not only with townspeople but with students and professors. If any of the latter had been doubtful as to a man who could not speak good grammar being a channel of divine blessing, their doubts were soon swept away. "The Spirit of GOD moved again and again over the large audiences . . . Hearts were bowed low, and young and old alike surrendered utterly to the claims of CHRIST." As a guest in the Frost home, the evangelist did some of his best work.

"Here my parents gathered on several occasions a picked company of seminary students, that they might hear Mr. Moorhouse expound the Word and have the opportunity of asking him questions. I, of course, had no right in that company, but, boylike, I hovered around, attracted by the sight of the circle of eager students and the kindly teacher in their midst. I have to confess that I heard little of what was said, and understood less. But deep impressions were made upon me. I recall, among other things, the flood of questions which poured in upon the little man, and the flood of answers which came back as, Bible in hand, the quick replies were given. And I recall how the teacher would pause at length, as one of the students would exclaim:

'Oh, Mr. Moorehouse, where do you get it all?'

'From here, just from here,' he would reply, with a smile, patting his Bible as he spoke."

It was a wonderful time for some of those students, as afterdays in the ministry proved. It was a wonderful time also for the unnoticed lad, who noticed all.

Two years after the visit of Moorehouse, Mr. Frost and Dr. McCorkle were successful in inducing the faculties of college and seminary to unite in bringing Mr. D. L. Moody to Princeton. Harry Frost was then about to enter college. He looked on with keenest interest at the marvelous quickening of spiritual life that took place under the evangelist's preaching. Princeton was moved as never before. So many godless men were powerfully converted that the student life of that important center was "wholly transformed." But, strange to say, young Frost was not himself brought at that time into the joy of full salvation. Perhaps he was preoccupied with the experiences just before him of "Freshman year," or too much taken up with college sports.

Princeton was certainly playing wonderful baseball in the spring of 1876, their famous pitcher, McMann, having discovered the art of curving the ball in its flight. Harry Frost was an ardent "fan" at these exciting games. He found his place in college activities, both indoors and out.

He pulled bow in a four-oared crew, was pitcher on the Freshman nine, and was among the first to go in for lawn tennis. In his studies he keenly enjoyed languages under Professor Karge, logic with Dr. Atwater, psychology and philosophy under President McCosh, and, most of all, English literature with Professor Hart.

His student days were supremely happy, because of satisfying friendships. He was a charter member and the first secretary of the well-known Ivy Club,\* which gave him a congenial circle. But the chief Friendship was neglected. He took no decided stand as a Christian.

During his college course he attended only one student prayer meeting, and was more interested in athletics, music, and good times socially than in his studies. But through it all, as he dimly realized, the prayers of his father and mother were "ever wrapped about him like a mantle."

*\*The Ivy Club was formed in 1877, its first meeting place being the small stone house at the head of Alexander Street, on the Episcopal Church grounds.*

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