

CLIMBING:
MEMORIES
of
A MISSIONARY'S WIFE
by
Mrs. Jonathan
ROSALIND GOFORTH
CHAPTER THREE
LEARNING TO SERVE BY LOVE

He taught me to yield up the love of life for the sake of a LIFE OF LOVE.

- Mrs. Krumm

WHEN in China about nine months, we moved to an interior mission station; the first step toward North Honan, our ultimate goal. Some of the missionaries at this station were of the very highest type. Among them was Mrs. S., widely known for her success in reaching Chinese women. There were also two young women, twins, who had been but a few months in China. I realized how my husband expected only the highest and best from me as a missionary, and I did not want to fail him or my divine Master. I determined, therefore, to learn something from Mrs. S. that would help me in view of the pioneer life we were facing. Little did I dream what the first lesson was to be.

One day, soon after Mrs. S. returned from a day in the villages, I went over to see her and said, "Mrs. S., I wish you would tell me some of your experiences that might help me in reaching the women."

In answer, she drew me down beside her and said, "I think something I went through today might help you." Then she told me the following story as nearly as I can recall her words:

"This morning I went to a distant village where the Christian women of that section were to meet in a certain house for study. But, as you know, it began to rain, and no outside women came; so I started to read with the Christian woman of the home. We were sitting close together on the kang (a brick platform bed). I had my arm around her as we read. Suddenly she began to cry, saying, 'O Mrs. S., don't let us read any more! My heart is so full I must talk to you.' So I drew her closer while she told me her troubles. The woman went on to say, 'My sister died some months ago, and since then I have had to care for her children as well as my own. Besides all the regular work of meals, sewing and so on, I have to weave cloth late into the night; and for weeks I have had no time for lice hunting! I and the whole family are just crawling with them: even the bed we are

sitting on is just alive!"

"O Mrs. S.," I simply gasped; "didn't you jump off the kang?" She replied: "Mrs. Goforth, listen! *I felt like it* but just as I was about to do so the words flashed through my mind, **'The love of Christ constraineth us** (II Corinthians 5:14) and instead I just drew the woman closer to me."

On hearing this, tears flowed freely as I cried in my heart, "O GOD, give me such love for my service in China!" Never was the lesson forgotten; and in years to come it was often needed as like experiences were gone through.

At the same station another important lesson was learned; this from the dear twin sisters. At that time home mail came only once a month. One morning as we were studying with our language teacher, an extra bulky foreign mail arrived. At once my husband dismissed the teacher, as it was nearly eleven o'clock, and we gave ourselves up to the enjoyment of at least skimming through our letters.

Remembering that the twins had been anxious about their beloved mother, who was ill in America, I went over to their room to inquire. I found them both studying hard with their language teacher. Expressing my surprise as I pointed to the great heap of mail waiting on a side table, one of them looked up and said hastily, "Yes, yes, we know, but duty first! It's study till 12 o'clock."

I turned and closed the door softly behind me, but a lesson had been learned. When I told my husband, he exclaimed, "Well, I am humbled! But we have learned our lesson!"

These young women probably never knew what an important lesson they had taught us through their example in putting first things first.

During the nine months spent at this station, a terrible famine raged throughout the eastern part of the province. For the first time we came to glimpse the horrors of famine. One day a blind beggar refugee led by a little boy about six years of age knelt outside the mission gate. Both were almost dead from exhaustion and starvation. Loving hands led them into the women's hospital, where they were first cleansed, then clothed and fed. Gradually, as the woman was able, the following sad story was drawn from her.

Months before, she and her husband with their child had started from their home to beg, as they and all about them were starving. Day by day, the husband's strength failed. Then one bitterly cold night, they took refuge in a wayside temple. All that night, in front of the idol's shrine, the blind wife knelt beside her dying husband. As the day dawned and the last struggle ceased, the blind woman wakened the child and, grasping her stick, motioned for him to lead her away. As she stood hesitating as to where to turn, there came the remembrance of someone telling of a place far off, a hundred miles away, where lived a man who could give sight to the blind. With desperation born of despair, she resolved to reach this man. The suffering endured on the journey can only be imagined. When attempting to tell the story of those days, the poor woman seemed able to recall little else than the ever present dread lest when the gateway of the wonderful man who could give her sight was at last reached, the door would be closed upon them!

The day after reaching the mission gate, the doctor's wife visited Mrs. Ma, the blind woman. "Mrs. Ma," she said, "the doctor wants you to be well fed before he can operate upon you. You must gain strength. Tell me just what you crave for most."

Mrs. Ma could not at first understand. Then, when the meaning dawned upon her, she stretched out her hands, and with a cry in her voice said, "If it is true that I can have what I crave for most, then give me, oh, give me just a little SALT!"

Just a little salt! What desperation! What agony of want was revealed in that cry! The operation restored the sight of one eye. It was my great joy and privilege to teach Mrs. Ma during her convalescence. My knowledge of the Chinese language at that time was exceedingly limited; but I at least practiced on her! From the love she showed to me, I knew she understood the language of love, even through the medium of my poor Chinese.

Mrs. Ma became a true Christian and for many years after we left that station served faithfully as matron of the women's hospital. Her son went through all grades of the mission schools and ultimately graduated with honors from Peking Union Medical College.

It was in Dr. and Mrs. Ma's cozy home next to the hospital of which Dr. Ma was in charge that I last saw old Mrs. Ma. She was very old and frail and again quite blind, but happy with her grandchildren about her. Her face radiated peace; and her last words to me were, "We shall meet in Gloryland."

The second major step had been taken. We had gone farther into the interior and nearer our future field - North Honan. (*Goforth of China*, pages 84-92.) We had just come to a strange city, Linching, and were among strangers.

The following experience may seem to some too sacred for recording, but how may I hope to help other climbers if the deep, furnace experiences of my life are withheld? So I record it, humbling though it is.

One evening as I lay on a couch beside a paper window through which every sound could be heard, I was drinking to its dregs the cup of sorrow. Little Gertrude, our firstborn, had died that morning. The father was on his way to a distant station taking the precious remains for burial.

Two Chinese women seated themselves outside the window. I could not help hearing what they said. They were, of course, quite unconscious of my closeness to them. At first they talked with much kindness and sympathy of the event that had just taken place. Then began a most amazing and searching dissection (no better word can express it) of my life and character. We had been told the Chinese were keen judges of character. But this was more. It revealed a surprisingly high conception of a Christian missionary! Incidents with the servants, which I had thought trivial, such as a stern rebuke, a hasty word or gesture, were all given their full value. During the process of dissection they did, however, find some good points. One said, "She speaks our language well and is a zealous preacher." The other admitted, "And she does love us. But it's her impatience, her quick temper!" Then came what struck me as a blow, "*If she only would live more as she preaches!*"

At first I was so angered I could have gone out and given them a piece of my mind, but no, I

could not, for it was all too true. It was this fact that cut so deeply. Then there came the remembrance of how I had hoped and expected by giving up all, even my money, before leaving Canada for China, my disposition would change. I saw my mistake! As that last hard word was heard, *If only she would I live more as she preaches*, I fled to my room. I had heard enough. It was useless to stay in China and simply preach CHRIST and not LIVE CHRIST even before our servants.

Two days later my husband returned to find a doubly crushed and broken wife. Oh, what a comforter and help he was. For many days I walked softly, but the lesson had to be relearned many times. As I look back on that sad, searching experience, I can see clearly it was all a step higher in my life, as it was then, just a struggling overcomer, but an overcomer - a climber up life's mountain-side.

The following story of my first effort as street evangelist has always been a treasured memory. It was at least unique!

My husband and Mr. McGillivray, his colleague, on leaving for a tour into North Honan immediately after Gertrude's death, arranged that I stay with Mrs. Perkins, of the American Board Mission, during their absence. It was in her home Gertrude had died. Our compound was more than a mile distant. The language teacher was there, so each morning, accompanied by my Chinese woman, I walked to this compound for language study. Our way led through a long, narrow street, lined with high brick walls, with heavy gateways opening into the courts beyond.

At first, as I passed along, women and girls kept mostly out of sight, peeping at the strange woman with men's feet. My first step in trying to reach these Chinese sisters was just to smile and nod as I went the full length of the street. Then I learned from the teacher to say correctly, *Wo yao chieh cho peng-yu* ("I want to make friends"). This worked wonders, and before many days women and their children gathered on their door-steps smiling and bowing. Some finally even asked me to sit down with them. By this time I had learned a very simple chorus in Chinese with a "catchy" tune. The words ran:

Come to JESUS; come to JESUS;
Come to JESUS just now.
Just now He will save you;
He will save you just now.

This I would sing to them, which always brought a crowd, and many times there was an encore. Soon they listened to our message, and with the help of my woman, JESUS was preached to them. By the time my husband returned, practically the whole street were my friends. Then we moved to a distant part of the city, and I quite lost sight of them.

Twenty-five years later, on visiting Linching with my husband for special meetings, I was told that for many years the women of that street were enquiring for "the foreign woman who wanted to be their friend."

Twice in the two years spent in Linching, we went down with a precious child to the Borderland. Our precious "Wee Donald," our first-born son, had gone to join his sister Gertrude and the host

of other little ones, of whom the Savior has said, "**Suffer [them] to come unto me.**"

A few weeks after Donald had left us, we started from Linching with three months' old Paul in a small house-boat for the journey up the narrow, tortuous Wei River for Chuwang, (*Goforth of China*, page 92.) just inside the long looked for "Promised Land" of North Honan. Our hearts were lonely and sad, yet joyful in anticipation of at last facing together pioneer service in our own field.

Three days' journey upstream brought us to the landing from which could be seen, far across the fields, the walls and gate of Chuwang. While my husband remained by the boat to see after our things, Mr. McGillivray undertook to escort Paul and myself to the mission. But my escort proved to be utterly unable to compete on foot with the chairbearers and was soon left far behind. A great crowd could be seen gathering about the town gate. When within hailing distance, the waiting crowds, with howls and yells, came racing toward us. On seeing a foreign woman and child in the chair, clods of earth were thrown at us from all sides. Little Paul became frenzied with fear, and the chair was again and again almost overturned by the great pressure of the crowd. But the chair-bearers kept their footing and pressed on until the mission gate was reached. Dr. McClure stood holding the gate open ready to let us in. The crowd became so wild and menacing that Dr. McClure seemed at once to sense something must be done to pacify them, so, catching Paul up in his arms as the chair passed through, he held the child high so all could see him. The threatening and yells at once changed to laughs and smiles. (The love for children is a marked characteristic of the Chinese.) A few moments later the gate was closed on a pleased and friendly crowd.

The following incident was, undoubtedly, the most testing in all our missionary experience to my loving Chinese women. I had about decided to withhold this story from these pages, but my daughter urged me to put it in, saying, "Only by giving some pictures of the dark side of mission life can those in the homeland understand the true conditions on the foreign field."

We had been a few months in Chuwang, and the people, as a whole, were still hostile. I had given the baby's *amah* strict injunctions never to carry the child outside the gateway, as we had a fairly large court with trees.

My husband and I were to take lunch one day with our neighbor missionary. Just as we were leaving, I turned to wave good-bye to the baby, who was in his high-chair. His face had such a strange expression on it, and the child was wriggling back and forth so violently, I ran forward, fearing something was hurting him. As I lifted his clothes, I fairly screamed for my husband. *The whole of the child's back was alive with eighty big lice!* (We counted them later.) It took but a few moments to strip the child and put him in a bath.

Some hours later a council of war was held to discover the cause of what we had found. We then learned that, against my orders, the *amah* had taken the child into a Chinese home near by. But this did not explain all. Then a Chinese teacher spoke up and said, "We must tell you the truth. It is not an uncommon thing for a woman who is jealous of another's child to gather all the vermin possible and put it on the little one!" Oh, the horror of it! For days I went about simply loathing the thought of getting in close contact with the women again. But as with Mrs. S. divine love conquered, and from that time I felt a love for the women such as I had never realized before. A

miracle? Yes, truly, the miracle of divine grace!

We turn with relief to a very different story from the one just given.

We were passing through one of the very darkest periods of our mission history. The attitude of the people was bitterly hostile and suspicious. If I remember correctly, more than a year passed in Chuwang before the first woman in-patient came. Her case was desperate; otherwise she would not have been brought to us. For weeks she lay in the hospital attended by her husband. She was, or had, been, a beautiful woman. From the first, her heart seemed ready and waiting for the glorious message we had to give.

One day, to my surprise, as I responded to a timid tap on the door, I found this dear woman standing there, timid and shrinking, uncertain as to whether she would be admitted. She was almost fainting from weakness. Leading her gently in, I placed her on a sofa and had a hot drink brought. Soon these visits became quite regular. As she visited, we talked of the precious truths that were so evidently illuminating her very soul. Half a century has passed since then, but the joy of leading that first woman to CHRIST still remains. Her favorite hymn was "My home is in Heaven; my home is not here." And how she loved to have me sing it while she tried to join in! Many were the lessons she unconsciously taught me of patience and fortitude under great suffering and simple child-like faith and trust. On one of her last visits before returning home, she asked a deep question concerning the HOLY SPIRIT which revealed what wonderful progress she had made in spiritual understanding. Some months later she died, but we knew she had passed away in the joyful hope of meeting her Redeemer.

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