

CLIMBING:
MEMORIES
of
A MISSIONARY'S WIFE
by
Mrs. Jonathan
ROSALIND GOFORTH
CHAPTER TEN
FURLOUGH MEMORIES

"He goeth before"

THE summer of 1908 found me, with five children, again facing a long journey, this time homeward. Dr. Goforth remaining in China for the revival missions opening to him on all sides.

In some unaccountable way, on arrival at Vancouver, no one met us, so we went at once to the nearest hotel, reaching there about 8 A.M. The hotel register signed, we were marched off to a small elevator, or "lift," as it was called. When all were in, we were pretty closely packed. Just before the start upward began, "W. W.," in a deep stage whisper, said, "Well, Mother, I think they are giving us a pretty small bedroom!" (I had warned the children that the bedrooms would be small.) The elevator boy seemed so overcome by the remark that it was some moments before he could start upward. Reaching our floor, we filed out into a large, square hall, where a maid was using a carpet sweeper. Again the irrepressible "W. W.," in his far-reaching whisper, exclaimed, with a look of surprise, "O Mother, look at that woman; she is sweeping the carpet with a lawn mower!"

We had arrived in Vancouver on Saturday. I found I would need someone to identify me before my draft could be cashed. In the telephone Book, I hunted up the name and address of a Presbyterian minister, who, I felt sure, would know of Dr. Goforth and help me.

I started off that boiling hot Saturday and never can I forget the sense of utter bewilderment and loneliness that came over me - a stranger in a strange land! Twice I lost my way. At last the right street was found, but after walking what seemed an endless distance, I ventured to ask at a door how far it was to the Dr. Blank's home.

The woman I addressed looked at me pityingly and replied, "You poor dear; you look just dead beat. Come in, I'll get you some tea in a jiffy!"

Since a "**cup of cold water**" will receive its reward, that woman must long ere this have received

a reward for that cup of tea! Rested, strengthened, and cheered by her kindness, I went on my way. But she really had looked at me as if I were a *female tramp*! No doubt I did look queer, for on reaching Dr. Blank's home, the maid left me standing in the hall while she carried my message to her master. Returning, she coldly signed for me to take the hall chair. After waiting a long time, Dr. Blank appeared. I rose and told briefly my story, he, the while, eyeing me suspiciously. I was then invited into the study, where he plied me with many questions, all indicating his determination to make quite sure I was not a fraud. Then suddenly he looked at his watch and rose, saying, "We have just time to reach the bank before closing."

On reaching the bank, this gentleman introduced me to the teller and when assured all was right, raised his hat courteously and disappeared. A lump, came in my throat as I sought to find my way back to the hotel.

That afternoon my oldest daughter, seeing I was feeling rather down, suggested leaving the children with Ruth and taking a walk.

We were undoubtedly unsophisticated in matters of fashion, coming as we did fresh from the heart of China. What we saw on that crowded street almost took our breath away. "Merry Widow" hats were in vogue. I could hear Helen gasp, "Oh, oh," as some specially striking head adornment drew near. I expected every moment to hear her ask me to buy some such thing for her; I was therefore indeed amazed when she turned to me with, "Mother, dear, isn't it simply awful! *Can't we go back to China on the boat we came by?*"

Just as we reached our hotel, we came face to face with the Bro. H. G., of Honan, an honored friend and coworker. He was to sail for China with his wife and family on the same boat on which we had come. This good man, though pressed with many matters of his own, simply took charge of us all, to my unbounded relief.

A little incident illustrating not physical or spiritual but INNER blindness occurred when passing through the most wonderful part of the Rocky Mountain region. The day was perfect, with just enough fleecy clouds to enhance the grandeur and gorgeousness of the snow-capped peaks. Even the younger children were thrilled with the wonderful scenery through which we were passing. Helen was constantly signing to me to share with her some specially exquisite scene.

On the car with us were a husband and wife with their twelve-year-old daughter. They were workers in Japan, and we had crossed the Pacific together. To my amazement, while passing through the most beautiful scenery, these good people drew down their blind and played "Flinch." Thinking they had not noticed the outside view, I ventured over to them and said, "The scenery is simply marvelous"; but the blank, cold stare with which this remark was greeted sent me back to my seat, wondering how it could be possible human beings, and "refined" ones, could be so absolutely BLIND.

On reaching one of the larger places en route, just as the children were being settled in their berths for the night, someone drew aside the curtain, saying, "There are ice cream cones being sold here." As "cones" had come in since my last furlough, I really did not know what the word meant, but "ice cream" was sufficiently attractive. So I said, "Get enough for all of us."

How I wish it were possible to have taken a "snap" of the children as their first "cones" were

handled and enjoyed. Silence reigned for a brief spell; then one child cried out mournfully, "Say, Mother, I can't get at all my ice cream. My tongue won't reach down far enough!"

I called to a fellow passenger, "However can the children get all the ice cream?"

With a hearty laugh, the reply came, "Why, eat the cone, of course."

I may say just here the following incidents are not given in the order in which they occurred, but as memory brings them to mind.

The following incident occurred in old St. John's Presbyterian Church, Toronto. The building had been enlarged from a mission hall. The minister, Bro. J. McP. Scott, was our friend of many years.

One Sunday morning, when seated well back in the church, I was startled to hear Dr. Scott announce, "We will sing hymn number-. Then will Mrs. Goforth please come forward and at the close of the hymn lead us in the Lord's prayer in Chinese." I knew the prayer in Chinese quite as well, as I did in English, but the suddenness of the call left my mind absolutely blank. If I could only have recalled the first Chinese word, I could have gone on, but I could not. While they were singing the hymn, I walked forward slowly, saying to myself in an agony of desperation, "How does it begin? How does it begin?" The platform was reached, and stepping forward to where Dr. Scott pointed, I found the congregation were already waiting with heads bowed.

What could I do? Then there flashed into my mind the hymn, "JESUS Loves Me," in Chinese. Without a tremor, I repeated slowly the first two verses with the chorus, about the length of the Lord's prayer. Then all the people said "Amen," and I retired to my seat. The situation was saved, but my conscience troubled me. I felt that I must tell someone, so the following week at the W. M. S. meeting I told what I had done. It was a great relief to have the women laugh heartily, all agreeing they would scarcely have done otherwise.

On a certain furlough, I brought home about seventy good lantern slides on our work in North Honan. After some rather trying experiences, I came to see it was imperative that certain conditions should be fulfilled to insure a successful lantern evening. The following experiences show that success depends largely on these conditions:

First essential - a good lantern.

Second essential - an expert operator.

Third essential - lantern, screen, etc., to be in place at least half an hour before meeting time, when slides should be tested as to perfect focus.

Fourth essential - the entire program should be in command of the lecturer.

Just two outstanding experiences are given by way of contrast and to illustrate the importance of these essentials. Receiving a most hearty, even urgent, request for my lantern lecture to be given during an important woman's missionary convention in M - (one of the largest and most important cities of the Dominion) I wrote back saying I would come only on condition a promise would be given me that they agree to the things mentioned. The reply was satisfactory. All would be arranged as I wished.

On reaching M-, a few hours before the meeting was to take place, my hostess seemed very uneasy. Finally she said, "I fear you will be disappointed, Mrs. Goforth. Some of the women on the committee were afraid you might disappoint them, so a regular program has been arranged; and though it was supposed just to supplement you, it is quite long. I really don't know when you will get a start!" It would be easier for one to imagine than for me to describe my feelings on hearing this. When I learned that the renowned Dr. Pringle, of the Yukon, was to give an address before me, I phoned those responsible and did my utmost to give up my part. But I had to submit; there was no way out, except that I remained absolutely firm on one point: Dr. Pringle must follow, not precede me.

It was a few moments after 8 o'clock when we reached the church, which was packed to the doors. With difficulty, we made our way to a front seat. A glance about was sufficient to confirm my fears: a long, flat church and an immense sounding board over the pulpit spoke eloquently of poor acoustics. But, worst of all, the curtain was so arranged that when swung across it would come to the *outer edge of the Platform and within three feet of the front seats*. Almost in a state of panic, I begged a woman to bring the minister to me. He came, looking, none too pleased.

I said, "Dr.- where am I to stand?"

For a moment he looked rather nonplussed. Then, he said, "We'll get a chair. You can stand on it!"

He turned away, but I could not let him go without one more effort. "But Dr. . . . the church is flat, the people will neither see nor hear me. Do at least ask the women to remove their Merry Widow hats!"

But the old gentleman declined, and left me. There was nothing more I could do. I seated myself in the front pew with a feeling of despair and waited for things to take their course.

The program, as arranged by the women, went on its way till considerably after nine o'clock. Then the curtain was drawn across, falling, as I had feared, at the outer edge of the platform. A small chair was brought and placed, with its back touching the curtain. Two men kindly came forward and lifted me on to the chair before that great audience! One of them, noticing how shaky I was, kept hold of me until I was able to balance myself. But to my horror, I almost fell off the chair again and again when I tried to turn so as to get a glimpse of the picture on the screen. Then the final failure began. The lantern, far back on the gallery, was hopelessly out of focus. Even I had the utmost difficulty in making out what a picture it was meant to be, and this not once, nor twice, but all pictures were the same. How I got through those seventy slides, I never could tell, but at last with help I descended from my perch. By this time half the audience had left. It was ten o'clock or after when Dr. Pringle took the platform.

I do hope all who have read the foregoing will not fail to read the following:

Some weeks after that (to me) truly terrible experience in M- (I trembled for days after), I was asked to give the same lecture in Winnipeg. In this case each stipulated condition was fully met. I ascended the platform of Dr. C. W. Gordon's church to face one of the finest audiences it has ever been my privilege to address. The Winnipeg Presbytery had come over in a body; the keen appreciation shown by the ministers' repeated applause did much to make the evening an

outstanding success. But nevertheless the slides were the same and my talk was the same as in M-. At the close of the lecture, a second and impromptu collection was taken up, and one hundred dollars was given to me as a personal gift. This later was put to the purchase of an organ for China.

We were on furlough at the time of the Great War. An invitation reached us from Dr. and Mrs. Talling, old friends, to attend a musicale at their home. I went alone, as Dr. Goforth was out of the city. Arriving rather late, I slipped into the one vacant seat near the door, for a solo was in progress. Just as it was ending, Dr. Talling all to me and whispered, "Nearly everyone is taking part. Now, what will you do?"

Without a thought of him taking me seriously, I replied laughingly, "Put me down for Tipperary, in Chinese."

The woman beside me heard what I said and, jumping to her feet, ran to the piano and started to play "Tipperary" in brilliant fashion. At the same time, Dr. Talling announced, while drawing me forward, "Mrs. Goforth will now favor us with Tipperary in Chinese."

"What could I do? I had no time even to get panicky when I found myself beside the piano; the accompanist nodded for me to begin. With a feeling akin to "I'll go through with it if I die in the attempt" I drew myself up and sang out with fun voice, then repeated softly as I felt within the tenderness of that chorus and what it had meant to our soldiers - well, I can only say the response was great, but I dared not respond to the encore!

As the gathering was breaking up, a woman came to me, saying, "Why, Mrs. Goforth, I did not know you were so musical. Do you have many musical advantages in China?"

When I endeavored to enlighten her on this point, she was most sympathetic. Several months passed; then shortly before returning to China I received a letter from this woman telling of a new Victrola with a number of records having been packed ready to accompany us to China, the gift of herself and her husband. So I never regretted my only appearance in public as a soloist. And what a blessing that Victrola was not only to ourselves but others!

In *Goforth of China*, I have already told of our first journey across the Pacific in the notorious "Parthia," notorious for its excessive "heaving, pitching, and rolling."

As we left that boat, I registered a silent but solemn vow that nothing, no nothing, could ever induce me to set foot on that vessel again. But alas for my vow!

Several years later, when returning to China alone with several children, passage was taken on the "Victoria" from Seattle, Washington. Four days out to sea, I made my first appearance in the dining-room.

Addressing the purser, by whom I was seated, I said, "Purser, this boat is simply terrible! It puts me in mind of the old Parthia, for its rolling, pitching, and heaving. I then told of the first journey to China and my vow, whereupon the purser laughed so loudly all eyes were turned to our table.

When able to speak, he said, "*Well, Mrs. Goforth, I'm sorry to tell you you've broken your vow. This is the old Parthia. She was taken over to Glasgow, cut in two, considerable added to her length, renamed Victoria, and returned to the Pacific by a different line.*"

An incident occurred when traveling by the Trans-Siberian route to China from England, which was nothing short of tragic to the writer.

We had to change cars many times and were impressed with the richness of the Russian trains. On one train the compartment we occupied was upholstered in the richest pale green plush, even to the floor rug. As the train meals were very expensive, and we had five children with us, I tried to lessen the expense by getting at least our breakfast. Our compartment was, as can be imagined, fairly crowded, with seven in it.

One morning, as I was endeavoring to pour thick, condensed coffee milk into a cup, one of the children accidentally knocked my arm with such force that the tin was sent flying, its contents scattering everywhere over the rich, silk plush. My first thought was, "What will the porter say?" We were to leave the train in an hour, so there was no time to be lost. While my husband took charge of the children in the hallway and did his best to clean the coffee from their clothes, I worked frantically (this is not too strong a word) with hot water to get the coffee stains out of the plush, but work as I would I only practically succeeded. How I wished we could have traveled sensibly C. P. R. tourist style. It was a guilty party that left the train that day.

~ end of chapter 10 ~
