

CLIMBING:

MEMORIES

of

A MISSIONARY'S WIFE

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW GOD TAUGHT ME TO FORGIVE

He that doth not forgive burns the bridge over which he himself must needs pass, for the Lord hath said, "**If ye forgive not. . . neither win your Father forgive your trespasses**" (Matthew 6:15).

The tragic story of how, but for the mercy of GOD, that jagged rock of unforgiveness would have wrecked me, body and soul, is given as a solemn warning to others.

The first sad details of how and why the demon of hate and unforgiveness entered my heart cannot be given, for another is involved who has passed on. Suffice it to say that those who knew the facts agree that humanly speaking one can scarcely imagine a case where unforgiveness was more justified; yet my dear husband, who had equal reason with myself for feeling as I did, quietly and calmly laid it all before the Lord and left it there and begged me to do the same; but I could not, or rather would not, forgive.

For more than a year, while the source of trouble remained at our station, I would not speak to or recognize that one. Four years passed, during which time the matter remained with me more or less in abeyance. Then one day my husband and I were traveling by train with a number of co-workers en route to the religious fair at Hsunhsien, where the most intensive and aggressive annual campaign of evangelism was carried on. This year I had been put in charge of the women's work there.

For months I had been deeply but secretly moved by the evident spiritual power that had come into my husband's life. I, his wife, could not but see that he was indeed filled with the SPIRIT of GOD. There had come into my soul a great yearning that I, too, might have this fullness of the Spirit.

As we sat there on the train that day, I asked my husband to sit with the others for I wanted to be alone. When he left, I bent my head and cried to GOD to fill me with His Spirit as He had filled my husband. Unmistakably clear came the Inner Voice, "Write to (the one towards whom I felt

hatred and unforgiveness), and ask forgiveness for the way you have treated him!" My whole soul cried out, "Never, never can I forgive him!" Again I prayed as before, and again the Inner Voice spoke clearly as before. Again I cried out in my heart, "Never; never. I will never forgive him!" When for the third time this was repeated, I jumped to my feet and said to myself, "I'll give it all up, for I'll never, never forgive!" I joined the others and laughed and talked to hide my agitation. Then followed the saddest part of my life. For several months I preached and prayed to keep up appearances but all the while my heart was becoming harder, colder, and more hopeless.

Then one day that passage in the *Pilgrim's Progress* came to me (I think I was reading to the children), where Christian, when going through the house of the Interpreter, came to the man in the cage who said, "I have grieved the Spirit, and He is gone: I have provoked GOD to anger, and He has left me." As I read this passage, a terrible conviction came upon me that the words I have quoted were true of me. During the two days and nights that followed, I was in the depths of despair, believing GOD's HOLY SPIRIT had left me. My husband was away from home, and there seemed no one to whom I could turn. Then GOD in His mercy sent someone to me.

A young missionary whose wife had died under peculiarly sad circumstances, when passing through our station, came over to see me. It was evening, and the children were in bed. We sat on the front steps together while he sobbingly told of his wife's tragic death. Suddenly the very flood gates seemed loosed within me, and I gave way to uncontrollable weeping. When able, I told all the story as I have related it, and its sad, early details, then ended with, "I have grieved the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, and He has left me!"

"But Mrs. Goforth," he said, "are you willing to write the letter?"

I replied: "I now know what it would be to be without GOD and without hope; and if I could only have another chance, there is nothing I would not do.

Again he asked, "Are you willing to write that letter?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Then go at once and write it."

With a glorious ray of hope dawning in me, I ran into the house, and in a few minutes returned with the letter. It was just a few lines of humble apology for my actions, without any reference to the other part. Oh, the joy that came, and thankfulness that it was indeed not too late.

From that time, I have never DARED not to forgive. There have been times when for hours, or even days, the battle was on again, but always the remembrance of this experience has enabled me to conquer and forgive.

The following is one instance, which speaks for itself, of what this testimony has meant to others.

When addressing a large gathering of women in R-, an important town in Ontario, I felt strangely led to relate this story, though it had no connection with what went before or after. While the story was being told, a strange hush and marked stillness came over the audience. It was not till

seven years later that I learned the reason for this. At the close of the annual meeting of the Women's Missionary Society in Ottawa, two women from the town of R- came up and told me the following striking story:

One of these women, Mrs. X., was the married daughter of a former pastor in R-. For years, while her father lived, she had led in the women's work of the church. When the new minister's wife, Mrs. S., attempted to take over the leadership of the women's work, trouble began. As time passed, a serious division arose, till at the time of my visit the whole church was divided. Practically all the women of both sides were present when I told the story of how the Lord taught me to forgive.

Mrs. S. went on to tell how, the morning I left, she had become so convicted and restless while preparing dinner she could stand it no longer. Leaving everything, she put on her hat and coat and started for the door, determined to go at once to Mrs. X. and make up. But before she reached the door, a knock came. On opening the door, she found Mrs. X. with outstretched hands and a look of love that could not be mistaken! On reaching this point of the story, Mrs. S. exclaimed, with a beaming face, "Mrs. Goforth, it was so easy to make up, for she had been convicted just as I was. We have been the best of friends ever since."

It is Longfellow who wrote, "If we could only read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility." Is it not true that every time we repeat the Lord's Prayer with unforgiveness in our heart it is a challenge to the Father NOT to forgive? Otherwise, the words, "Forgive us AS we forgive," have no meaning.

O GOD! that men would see a little clearer,
Or judge less harshly when we cannot see!
O GOD! that men would draw a little nearer
To one another. They'd be nearer Thee
And UNDERSTOOD.

~ end of chapter 7 ~
