

**CLIMBING:**

**MEMORIES**

of

**A MISSIONARY'S WIFE**

by

Mrs. Jonathan

**ROSALIND GOFORTH**

**CHAPTER TWO**

**PROOFS OF GOD'S PRESENCE**

Open my ears to music: let me  
Thrill with Spring's first flutes and drums,  
But never let me dare forget  
The bitter ballads of the slums.

PATTERSON PLACE, a fire trap of an old tenement crowded with the poorest of the poor, was situated in the midst of Toronto's East End slums. The third and top story, used as a dance hall, had recently been raided by the police and was vacant. This we rented for our mission hall, and truly we could not have found a better place for reaching the persons we were after.

The large, low, dirty loft was transformed into an attractive meeting-place. During those days, everything needed - benches, tables, lamps, and even an organ - came in as we knelt in prayer and laid all needs definitely before the Lord. I seemed to be living in a world of miracle.

Strange to say, I was appointed head of the district visitors. Bewildered as to how or where to begin, I turned in desperation to Mrs. Lane, an old, experienced deaconess at the main central mission. This dear woman gave two days in leading me into the slum homes. Practically every door opened to us as Mrs. Lane, with sympathy and love shining in her eyes, sought for entrance. In every home, no matter what the condition of the floor might be, Mrs. Lane knelt and offered a simple, helpful, comforting prayer, and we could feel in the room the hush and stillness of appreciation. Later I determined to do exactly as Mrs. Lane had done; and, oh, in the years that followed, what blessed returns came from every bit of love and sympathy given these struggling, heart-broken, disappointed women!

Space permits of but one story of that time in detail. Indeed it is a wonderful story of what may be termed **BLIND GUIDANCE**.

New Year's Day, 1887, was bitterly cold. Jonathan Goforth and I started for a walk through the Rosedale ravine just north of my home. On reaching Parliament Street, instead of turning

northward to the ravine, I stopped short and said, "Jonathan, I feel strangely impressed that we should go south down to the slum district."

He looked at me amazed, and for several moments we stood debating, for he strongly objected, saying very truly that Parliament Street was the last place for a lovers' walk!

At last I said, "Did you ever feel so clearly led to do something that you just had to do it?"

To this he replied, "If that is how you feel, let us go south." (But it was a very silent walk!) For almost a mile and half we walked down Parliament. Then I led the way a block east. By this time I was, getting pretty nervous.

Hesitating for a moment, I led on down Sackville Street for over a block, then stopped in front of a small cottage and said, "O Jonathan, don't look at me as if I had gone crazy! Let us knock at this door."

Jonathan, evidently getting anxious, exclaimed, "But why?" "I don't know," I replied. Now I must say the man of this house was such a drunken fellow I had always avoided visiting his wife at times when he might be in. But at this time I knew of no reason whatever why I should call. We knocked.

The husband opened the door, and on seeing me cried out, with tears running down his face, "Oh, Miss Bell-Smith, GOD has sent you!"

We found the place like an ice house: no fuel, no fire, no food. The poor wife was lying on a miserable bed with but little over her and seemingly coughing her life away. In the corner of the room lay a dead baby, born a few hours before. Their sad story was quickly told. The man had gone to the city hall for help, but it was closed, it being New Year's Day. Returning to his wife with his last hope of help gone, he sank down by her bedside and joined her in crying to the Lord to send someone to them. *At that very time the strange impelling had come to me.*

The story would not be complete without the following: Forty years later my daughter Ruth (Mrs. D. I. Jeffrey of Indo-China) when on furlough addressed a meeting in the East End Mission Hall. A poor old crippled woman was helped in and seated at the door. She asked that Ruth be brought to her. Then tremblingly she unwrapped a tiny parcel and handed to Ruth a small gold coin worth two dollars and fifty cents, saying, "Give this to your mother and tell her I have never forgotten how she saved my life forty years ago." She had been keeping the coin for that purpose for years.

I hesitate and have hesitated long before writing the following, fearing lest some may misunderstand. But the story touches a chord that runs through most of my life as a struggling overcomer - a climber!

Our beloved mother died in May, 1887. For some time I had felt increasingly that whatever would come to me at her death should be put in trust for a memorial chapel and hospital in China when a permanent station was secured. My reason for this was twofold; first, because of gratitude for what it had cost Mother to give me up. But the second reason (which I did not dare tell anyone, not even Jonathan Goforth) was - I hoped by giving absolutely all, even my money,

to the Lord I would surely then be worthy of the godly man I was to marry *and become my ideal of what a missionary should be - patient, forbearing, yielding, and easy to get along with!* I knew, as few if any knew, what my artist temperament meant - it was impulsive, super-sensitive, quick tempered, proud - but why give the whole list of the "**Little foxes that destroy the vines**"? I wanted at any cost to be worthy of Jonathan Goforth. So the few thousands that came to me were made over in trust to the church. I kept what I thought was just sufficient to tide me over till our marriage a few months later. This led to what seemed to us both a beautiful seal on our new life.

We were to be married on October 25. For a month or more, I had been awakening to the fact that what I had thought would be sufficient to meet my needs till my wedding day was not sufficient, and I would need fifty dollars more in order to be married free of debt. I had never needed to trust for temporal things or money. It was a time of real testing. I had been much impressed by Hudson Taylor's simple testimonies to answered prayer recorded in that wonderful book, *China's Spiritual Need and Claims*: I resolved, therefore, to ask the Lord for fifty dollars, thinking the while that if I had not faith enough for this, I was not worthy of being a missionary. The Lord saw fit to test me to the utmost, and as the wedding day drew near and no sign of money, I was sorely tempted to give someone just a hint of my need, but I did not. Then the evening before the wedding, when quite a number were gathered in the back parlor, including Jonathan Goforth, a knock came at the door. I opened it to find several of my coworkers from the East End Mission had come with a beautiful illuminated address. After this had been presented, a very small purse was handed to me, which I received, but with the inward thought, "How strange to give such a useless thing as this!" When all were gone, I went back to the friends who were curious to know what it was all about. Then I held up the purse and said, "Isn't it strange to give such a mite of a thing as this!"

My two hundred forty pound brother Randolph bent back in his chair and laughed so immoderately we thought there would be a crash. He exclaimed, "Why, Rosie, you foolish girl, *open it!*" I did so and found a fifty dollar gold piece within.

Shortly before leaving for China, January, 1888, word reached us of a beautiful twenty-four stop organ being given us by the ladies of Uxbridge. It was, however, too late to go with us, which later seemed quite providential, for had it accompanied us it would most likely have been lost in the fire that destroyed most of our belongings soon after settling in Chefoo. (*Goforth of China*, page 75).

As I recall those early years in China, my heart warms at the remembrance of what the organ meant to us both. Those who have read the life of my husband will know what an exceedingly strenuous, highly strung life he lived. That which seemed to soothe and rest him more than anything else was when, supper ended, the lights were turned low and he would rest on the sofa for a brief spell before going to the Street Chapel or other ministry, while I sang and played softly his favorite hymns. Sometimes he would rise and join in the singing.

As I write, a vivid and precious scene, which occurred years later, comes up before me. One Sunday morning in April, warm and bright, we were singing together by the open window in our home in Changte. The hymn was one my husband loved. The chorus ran:

Angels of JESUS, angels of light,  
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

As he sang, he seemed to forget himself, and with face uplifted and full, unrestrained voice he sang heartily and joyously. Just as the hymn was finished, one of our coworkers appeared at the window and with a look of surprise said, "Why, Goforth, I never knew you had such a voice. We thought you had some great singer over here."

I replied laughingly, for my husband looked rather sheepish, "Yes, he has improved greatly. I tell him he could not carry the tune of 'JESUS Loves Me' correctly when I married him."

My earnest desire in writing these life stories is to help other "climbers," even through my failures, so I give the following incident, which many times has come vividly to mind, always with regret.

On leaving the dreadful "Parthia" (*Goforth of China*, page 71) at Kobe, on our first voyage to China, we changed to another vessel for Shanghai. There came on board there a missionary and his wife and two little children, one about two years, the other an infant of less than two months. It was noticed on board that the wife, though very frail, seemed to have the entire care of both children, her husband being rarely seen with her.

One day it was quite rough; as I was descending the winding staircase, holding on to the banister, I met this dear mother ascending to the deck above. One arm held the baby; the other with difficulty kept hold of the older child while steadying herself against the rail. How my heart went out to her in pity! I said to myself, "That cruel husband, to leave her alone with these little children"; *but I did not stretch out a hand to help!* The mother was too intent on trying to save herself from falling even to notice my look of pity.

In years to come, when traveling with my own little ones, how often, when others have helped me while I was in as much need as was she, has the remembrance of my thoughtlessness come vividly to mind. Why did I not help? Perhaps just "cause I didn't think," but it was a lost opportunity for we reached port soon after, and I never saw her again.

I shall pass through this world but once.  
Any good, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness  
I can show to any human being, let me do it NOW -  
for I shall not pass this way again.

As I face my desk this morning, a voice reaches me: "Mother, you surely are not omitting those amusing incidents from that record."

To this I reply, "This which I am writing is not for amusement, and the incidents you refer to would be quite out of place."

"But, Mother," the voice persists, "has GOD no place for amusement in His plan for His children?"

These words set the thread of memory aglow and there comes the remembrance of that "saving

grace of humor" that so characterized my husband all down the years, saving the situation for us numerous times. So I yield, and some incidents that may be considered amusing will find their way into this record.

One experience my dear husband always recalled with keen enjoyment was connected with Chinese donkeys. It occurred a few weeks after our arrival in China. We had moved into our new home following the fire. (*Goforth of China*, page 75.) Our house faced on a narrow but very busy thoroughfare. I was sitting one morning sewing, my husband near by studying with his language teacher, when suddenly the air was rent by what seemed to me blood-curdling sounds. It was as if an animal were being literally torn to pieces. Each moment the wails and gasps from the poor creature became more heart-rending. I jumped to my feet and, grasping my husband's arm, cried, "Jonathan, those wicked heathen are torturing the poor creature. Oh, go, go and stop them!"

But instead of showing any pity, he kept laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks.

Then as an extra loud and terrible wail came, rising higher and higher, and ending in a death-like gasp - then silence, I covered my face and burst into tears, crying out, "O Jonathan, it is dead! I never, never thought you could be so heartless and cruel!"

At this he rose and, putting his arm about me, controlled himself enough to say, "Why, Rose, do you mean to say you never heard a donkey BRAY?"

"No," I replied, "But THAT'S not braying!"

"If you don't believe me," he replied, "just look out of the window and you'll find the donkey trotting peacefully along beside its owner." I ran to the window and saw a dozen donkeys trotting along beside their respective owners, but no sign of even one dead donkey!

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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