

CLIMBING:
MEMORIES
of
A MISSIONARY'S WIFE
by
Mrs. Jonathan
ROSALIND GOFORTH
CHAPTER FOUR
INCOMPARABLE SERVICE

You do not test the resources of GOD till you try the impossible. - F. B. Meyer

WE had come at last to facing pioneer living realities. Before us lay the great, heathen city of Changte and around us a vast region with its almost countless towns and villages; (*Goforth of China*, chaps. 2, 8 and 9, tells the man's side of the opening of Changte.) and I, the only woman with the message of light for my sisters living in spiritual darkness so dense as to be felt.

On our arrival by cart from Chuwang that first evening, as we entered our three-roomed Chinese home, I gathered my three children about me and registered a vow by the grace of GOD, I would do all in my power to take the old, old story to my sisters in that region.

We had come at the time when hordes of women and girls - cotton gleaners - were scouring the countryside. These could be heard as they tore past our gateway, some thirty and forty at a time. Believing there was safety in numbers, and overcome with curiosity, they would rush into our inner court like untamed animals. They had never seen a foreign woman before and were wild to see the children but would rush off as they had come. This stage quickly passed; then I literally had to bait the women to listen by telling them, unless they sat down on the mats provided for them and listened to the story I had to tell, I would not allow them to see inside my home. This plan simply worked wonders. The crowds became so great our court yard from almost daylight till dark resembled a circus.

Things began to disappear in an alarming manner, for while playing the organ (i. e., "the mystery box") my back was toward the crowd. Then I had an inspiration, which doubtless saved many a spoon or other article from being slipped up a capacious sleeve. It was simply to turn the organ around, with my seat in the corner; thus I could keep a watchful eye on my audience while playing.

One day my husband taught me a lesson I could never forget. (He was really a wonderful disciplinarian!) The day had been an unusually strenuous one, and I was really very tired.

Toward evening, a crowd of women burst open the living-room door and came trooping in before I had time to meet them outside. One woman set herself out to make things unpleasant. She was rough and repulsive and, well, just indescribably filthy. I paid no attention to her except to treat her as courteously as the rest. But when she put both hands to her nose, saying loudly, "Oh, these foreign devils, the smell 'of their home is unbearable!" my temper rose in a flash and, turning on her with anger, I said, "How dare you speak like that! Leave the room!" The crowd, sensing a "storm," fled. I heard one say, "That foreign devil woman has a temper just like ours!"

Now, I had not noticed that the door of my husband's study was ajar, nor did I know that he was inside, until, as the last woman disappeared, the door opened and he came forward, looking solemn and stern. "Rose, how could you so forget yourself?" he said. "Do you realize that just one such incident may undo months of self-sacrificing, loving service?"

"But, Jonathan," I returned, "you don't know how she-."

But he interrupted, "Yes, I do; I heard all. You certainly had reason to be annoyed; but were you *justified*, with all that is hanging in the balance and GOD's grace sufficient to keep you patient?"

As he turned to re-enter his study, he said, "*All I can say is I am disappointed!*"

Oh, how that last word cut me. I deserved it, yes, but, oh, I did so want to reach up to the high ideals he had. A tempestuous time followed alone in our inner room with my Lord. As I look back now, it was all just one farther step up the rocky hillside of life - *just climbing!*

Those very earliest days and weeks at Changte were indeed times of testing. Often it seemed, at least to me, all useless, hopeless, like "**casting bread upon the waters.**" But one little thing helped me more than I could ever tell. I had a Chinese carpenter make a good sized blackboard. This I placed on a wall in our living-room. It was really intended for the children, for the drawing of letters, pictures, and so on. One day when feeling discouraged and in need of help, I opened my Bible and was led (I know) to II Corinthians 9:6: "**He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.**"

So impressed was I with the latter clause I went to the blackboard and printed in large letters, high up out of the children's reach, the words:

HE WHICH SOWETH BOUNTIFULLY
SHALL REAP ALSO BOUNTIFULLY

For more than two years, until our new home was built, this promise remained constantly before me, an ever-present incentive to sow bountifully the Gospel seed, as I have endeavored to picture it, even though it often seemed the seed was being cast on stony ground. The day came, however, when my beloved husband and I were permitted to see bountiful harvests of souls reaped for our Master in that region.

In my husband's life, I have told the story of how, in answer to the prayer that seemed like asking for "rain from a clear sky," a truly Spirit-filled helper, Wangfulin, came just when it seemed my husband would break under the strain of those first weeks at Changte.

This "answer" gave me courage to pray for a Bible woman. (*Miracle Lives of China*, chapter 2, page 56.) Those who know anything of mission work fifty years ago, know that a really helpful Bible woman was far more difficult to secure than a male evangelist. We had as yet no baptized converts, and, as far as I knew, not a single professing Christian woman. But the remarkable way in which Wangfulin had come to us gave me faith to ask and expect the seemingly impossible. I had but a few days to wait, when the answer came.

Bro. Donald McGillivray was then my husband's sole colleague at Changte. He had charge of the outside touring. One day he came in calling to me: "Mrs. Goforth, where are you? I've got a full-fledged, ready-made Bible woman for you!" He then told me of coming across, when touring in the foot-hills of Changte, an elderly widow, who for years had been a leader and preacher in a Buddhist sect. She had become a Christian through a member of the same sect who had heard the Gospel and accepted CHRIST.

Mr. McGillivray told how this woman, Mrs. Chang, was now as keen to preach the Christian faith as she had been to preach Buddhism. There were difficulties, however, in the way of her coming to me as a Bible woman, but these were surmounted; by taking her first as a learner. For years Mrs. Chang was truly a God-sent helper. During the terrible ordeal of 1900, she was faithful almost unto death, being strung up by her thumbs by the Boxers, but was saved through the intervention of neighbors. She died in 1903, rejoicing in her Saviour.

We had been about nine months in Changte when the weather began to be very hot. Quite unconscious of what it was going to mean to ourselves and the work, we started to use raspberry vinegar (which had come all the way from London, England) at our noon meals. This seemed not so much a luxury as a necessity, for no ice could be obtained and all drinking water had to be boiled. While at dinner we allowed no one inside, but day by day the windows and the open door were banked with faces keenly watching. Fear, even terror, seemed written on some faces. This went on for several weeks, when a hint came to us of a report being widely circulated that we could be seen day by day drinking the blood of children we had killed. Of course no more raspberry vinegar appeared, but, oh, the horror of it!

At last we moved into our comfortable semi-foreign home. My husband seemed to be walking on air, he was so happy to find the new home proving a help and not a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel; for we continued to keep open house.

As a concession to Chinese ideas, the verandah, running the full length of the house, had been made the usual narrow width. Two persons walking together had to have one keep slightly behind the other or bumps on posts would follow. One evening my husband and I were taking a brief constitutional on the verandah before his leaving for the street chapel. He kept stepping out so fast and so vigorously that I became quite out of breath trying to keep pace with him. At last I exclaimed, "Jonathan, what are you thinking of? I can't keep up with you."

At once he slackened his pace and said, with a look of joy, "Why, Rose, I was thinking what a glorious work this is. Do you know, *I would not change places with a millionaire*, no, not with Rockefeller himself."

To this my heart thrilled a very joyous response.

Yet to be quite truthful, the method we had adopted was sometimes exceedingly testing to patience and endurance, at least to me as the mother of several small children. Sometimes I just prayed for a rainy day, so women would not come, and I could have a chance to make headway with the children's sewing and lessons. Sometimes women appeared in bands any time almost from daylight till dark. I will give one picture that must speak for itself why, at times, the way seemed HARD. It is but a typical case in many.

One day, when in the midst of cutting out a child's dress, with material, scissors, etc., spread on the dining table, a crowd of women burst into the room. For a little while all was utter confusion, the women struggling with each other to get at the baby in the *amah's* arms. (I always seemed to have a baby in arms those days.) By use of a little tact and urging all were soon seated on the rugs which they preferred to chairs. The promise that all would be shown everything they wished to see if they kept quiet and listened, proved then and many times later, a valuable bait. A half hour, or as long, as they would listen, I preached CHRIST to them; then the promise had to be kept. Nothing escaped their curious eyes. Beds had to be turned up, the sewing machine run and organ played. But the high mark of interest was in kitchen and cellar; though some women were too frightened to enter the latter. When satisfied, all hurried away as they had come. Tired, and questioning, "Is it worth while?" I returned to my work, to find scissors and most of the material gone; not enough left to finish the dress! Provoking? Exceedingly provoking! But there is always a price to pay for what is worth while.

One little, illuminating incident of this period I can never forget. Our beautiful, golden-haired Florence was so fond of dolls that in the course of her eight years of life a regular little family had gathered about her. One of her favorite ways of playing with them was to place all in a row, just inside a bed, with the heads peeping above the clothes. Some had faces very life-like: some could sleep!

One day, while leading a crowd of women through the house, some rushed ahead into the bedroom. One glance at the dolls caused them to shriek in terror and run as for their lives. Those behind pressed forward to learn the cause of the alarm, and on catching sight of the dolls, a panic seized them.

They fairly trod on each other in their haste to get out. The report was widely circulated that we kidnaped children. These women no doubt added greatly to this report, for had they not seen a whole row of them?

But times were changing. The promise, "**He which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully,**" was being fulfilled. Women came more and more quietly to sit and listen, yes, and learn and accept the wonderful message of a Saviour from sin, who was able to give them hope, eternal hope. Oh, it was wonderful to see interest change to hope, and hope to wonder and joy when dealing with women who had never heard a word, a hint of any hope for the future. Often I wished that women in the homeland could see such evidence of the transforming power of the Gospel and experience the joy of leading a soul out of darkness to the One Who alone is the Light of the world. How it cheered one to have women come again and again and say, "Tell us more about the One Who can help us!"

The following is a glimpse of how, or perhaps why, the work grew so surprisingly. About ten miles to the south of Changte lay the large farming village of Takwanchwang. The leading and most prosperous farmer of that region appeared one day with the request that Dr. Goforth lead him through our home as I did the women. Everything was examined as far as the kitchen. Then Mr. Wang, the farmer, said, "Isn't there anything more?"

"Well, no," was the reply; "only the cellar." "Cellar," exclaimed the farmer; "why that is what I came to see most of all." Down they went. Coal and book boxes, everything was examined, my husband helping in the search! Then, when satisfied that nothing had escaped him, Mr. Wang turned to Dr. Goforth with a look of utter amazement, saying, "Oh, but we Chinese are liars! My neighbors told me they had seen, with their own eyes, crocks of children's flesh salted down in the cellar! It's that which has kept me from coming to you before."

A few days later this man again turned up leading a band of the chief men of his village. With a triumphant look in his eyes, Mr. Wang led as he had been led. On reaching the cellar, he cried, "Look now; look, I say. Dig deep into the coal. Search and see if you can find even one dead baby. Oh, you liars, to tell me you had seen them!" Then off to the city the men were taken, where Mr. Wang treated them all to a grand feast.

This was not all. A few days later a farmer's four-wheeled wagon appeared, loaded to the limit with women, all whom Mr. Wang could coax to come. They were led through the same process of enlightenment. All were frightened and timid till they returned from the cellar; then they were joking and laughing and even willing to partake of the tea and refreshments I had provided for them, though before they were too frightened to taste anything lest they be bewitched. These women also were treated to a dinner by Mr. Wang. Is it much wonder Takwanchwang became the first self-supporting out station, and many are the happy memories of visits to that center?

But enough has been written of that early period. Clouds, dark and threatening, were fast gathering. Uncertainty, suspense, alarming rumors, unrest, among the people, threats of attacks by organized bands, all culminated in sickening dread of what the future might bring.

Then the beginning of that hurricane of horrors came.

On the 19th of June, 1900, our darling seven-year-old, beautiful, gentle, sunny Florence, lay dying. Gently my husband had insisted on my leaving the room before the end came.

As I paced up and down under the star-lit sky, wails of the people praying to their gods for rain could be heard on all sides, for the sky had been as brass for many months, and cruel famine was at the door. Fear, heart-gripping fear, seemed pressing upon one from all sides. And Florence! How could I see even a ray of light in the darkness? As I cried aloud with my hands clasped heavenward, "O GOD, O Lord JESUS, why? Why?" there came the answer, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter." And again, as if written in the starlit sky, "THE LORD REIGNETH." Then the presence of the Lord became very near in comforting, sustaining power, and I was ready for the word that soon came. Our darling's sufferings were ended.

The story of "The Escape" with its record of repeated and miraculous deliverances, has already been told in my husband's life. (*Goforth of China*, chap X.)

There is an experience I withheld from that account as it concerned more particularly myself and the children. This experience meant much to me, revealing as it did the tender compassion of the Lord for His child in desperate need; I feel it should be given here.

We had reached Shanghai, which we found crowded with refugees. The only place found for us to spend the ten days before our steamer sailed was an empty house in which a few pieces of absolutely necessary furniture had been placed. My husband and Paul were able to buy some ready-made clothes and I had succeeded with great difficulty in having one dress made by a Chinese tailor. But the other three children! They were in rags given by the Chinese on the journey. How could I, without materials, without a machine, get an outfit made for even one, and the ocean voyage just ahead! Alone with the baby one morning I cast myself down by the little one and cried again and again, to the Lord to send someone to help me, My distress was great. Help I must have, but I knew no one to whom I could turn. Then suddenly, while I was praying, the doorbell rang. On opening the door, I found two women outside. They introduced themselves and told of having seen our names among those of the refugees. They were in charge of a Chinese girls' school, but on account of the Boxer troubles, all the girls had been sent home. They then said, "We have nothing to do and thought you may need help." Scarcely able to speak, I told them rapidly my story; how I was on my knees pleading for help when they rang the bell. A few moments followed in which we stood clasping hands, weeping, just too full for speech. Then they went away to get materials, for there was no time to lose.

In a very short time, they returned with a pile of materials of from three to five yard lengths. I cut out and gave directions for a number of garments. The women took all away, and with the help of some friends, made practically everything needed except for the baby, who in the rush of getting others provided for, was forgotten! The day we sailed, I gathered a quantity of material together, planning to make the most necessary things for him on board ship. Then came the most beautiful proof of all of GOD's overshadowing care.

We had been passing through the Inland Sea and were nearing Yokohama. I had been trying my utmost to get some necessary things ready for baby W., but my hands trembled so I could scarcely hold the needle. I struggled on, realizing my strength was going, but kept sewing till I could no longer see the needle. Rising I folded the work and, going down to the cabin, put it quietly, numbly into the trunk, saying, "Lord, I have done all I can. I can do no more. As you provided for the others, do so now for baby." I then went on deck and lay down on a long chair exhausted. How long I lay there I do not know, but suddenly someone touched me and said, "There's a large bundle come off the lighter for you: it is in your cabin." Dazed at first, I could not take it in. Then it flashed into my mind, "It's the answer!" In the cabin, I found a letter attached to the bundle from Mrs. O. E., of the China Inland Mission, whose husband was at that time risking his life in China seeking to bring out to safety women of the mission who were in peril. The letter stated that her little son, the same age as my baby, had died some months before and she felt it laid upon her to send me, for my child, his outfit. I opened the bundle; to find not only a most beautiful, complete outfit, for my little one, but also many things I needed for myself and the other children. It was indeed one of the Lord's exceeding abundant answers. Is it any wonder that those words written so long ago by the Psalmist have always had a deep thrill of response in my heart?

I love the LORD, because he hath heard my

**voice and my supplications.
Because he hath inclined his ear unto me,
therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.**

- Psalm 116:1-2

~ end of chapter 4 ~
