

CLIMBING:
MEMORIES
of
A MISSIONARY'S WIFE
by
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CHAPTER ELEVEN
MISSIONARY MODES

"Fools for Christ's sake" (The Apostle Paul)

I WONDER how many who may read these pages have heard the expression, "Those dowdy missionaries!" or how many, even on certain occasions, have had the expression forced from themselves?

Now, I know in writing as I am about to do, there will be danger of giving offence to some. All missionaries are not dowdy, and none, I believe, really wish to be so. Some are even quite dressy! It is, however, a fact that many missionaries are quite misunderstood because of what may be called their, "modes. "

I have been urged to tell something of my own experience in the matter of dress when returning to the Homeland. I do so, not because the stories are somewhat amusing, but chiefly that through these incidents the reader may better understand why missionaries find it difficult to adopt modes that will satisfy and please all critical eyes when on platforms or elsewhere in the homelands.

On our first furlough, I purchased a dark green velvet toque, with just one ornament - a very dainty yellow osprey. When wearing that toque, I always faced an audience with the feeling that my appearance was "beyond reproach" but, alas, my pride had a fall when, toward the end of the winter, a woman came up to my husband and said: "Why do you allow your wife to wear that green toque? She is doing a great deal of harm. People think it very wrong for her to wear that osprey!" Of course I felt very bad when told this because of my having been a stumbling-block. I had a good cry; and, of course, the osprey was destroyed, leaving my unadorned toque decidedly dowdy.

During the following furlough, a deputation of two waited on me immediately on our arrival in Toronto. They came from the ladies of a certain church, who had chosen them to fit me out

completely at their expense. After my experience on our previous furlough, I was greatly relieved that the responsibility of choosing my mode should be on others. So the three of us went down town. (I may just remark here that I was not far beyond thirty). The first article chosen was a perfectly plain but good black dress, the second, a black cape, with wide silk ribbon heavily box pleated around the neck. The cape was tied with a generous bow of ribbon of the same width, with two long ends hanging down. We then went to the millinery department. Of course I left myself entirely in the hands of my friends. A beautiful bonnet of rich black silk, black flowers, and ribbon was chosen. It fastened by a heavy black ribbon bow with long ends. But it was the height of the bonnet that startled me and gave me a sense of uneasiness. My old hat and coat were left to be sent home, and I put on the bonnet and cape. On reaching home, my husband and all the children met me at the door. On catching sight of my new outfit, Dr. Goforth exclaimed in an awe-stricken voice: "Why, Rose, what on earth have you got on? You look an old woman"

"Please don't find fault with the things," I replied, "I'll have to wear them, for all the money is spent." Well, dear friends, I did wear that bonnet and cape several months, PERFORCE. Then one day, I was traveling by train with my four children. A woman on the opposite side of the train rose and, coming over to me, said: "I have been so interested in watching you and your lovely *grandchildren!*" This was too much! I thought, "It's the bonnet." On returning to Toronto, I went at once and bought a simple and inexpensive toque, of which I have never heard, fortunately, any adverse criticism.

Returning to Canada in the early summer of 1916, my husband was so seriously ill he was quite unable to do any public speaking. I had found it very difficult to get anything like even a passable outfit for the journey. I had secured a black sailor hat, which was all the style then. With pictures of hats trimmed with black silk bows high and very upright. I succeeded after considerable trouble in trimming the hat, making three bows remain upright by sewing them on to steel hairpins, which had been straightened out. So I trimmed the hat to my entire satisfaction, and all who saw it on me admired it, till I became quite vain.

We reached Vancouver late Saturday night, when all stores were closed. A telephone message came saying Dr. Goforth was booked to speak Sunday night at a certain church (one of the largest in Vancouver). As he could not go, I had to take his place.

Naturally, before leaving for the church that Sunday night, I admired to the full my quite stylish, self-trimmed hat, with the thought, "Well, at least they won't say I'm dowdy. The church was packed. Up to a certain point, I seemed to hold the audience. Then something happened. There were strange looks that came over the faces - startled, surprised, amused, even amazed expressions. I could not understand the meaning of it, not till I walked rather proudly up to the looking glass on reaching my own room. Then to my horror and disgust I saw that the three ribbon bows had fallen flat, *leaving the three hairpins standing upright alone!*

Oh, the humiliation of it! I could almost hear voices saying, "Oh, those awful missionaries! Why don't they dress decently?" Little did that audience know how keenly I had wanted to at least "pass muster!"

Many China missionaries could, no doubt, tell stories of getting suits made by Chinese tailors in Shanghai, which there were considered quite passable, but when the home circle was reached

would be considered "impossible."

On one occasion, I had such a suit made and wore it with the utmost satisfaction, unconscious of criticism, until a frank friend told me, after arrival in Toronto, "You cannot possibly go to church in such a thing!" That suit was laid away carefully and met the fate, on our return to China a year later, of being cut up into wee boy's underwear.

Though many stories, both amusing and tragic, could be told along the same line, these will suffice. Those, I trust, who have the understanding heart, will be able to read in these experiences some of the problems "modes" present to missionaries when preparing to face the critical "home" eyes accustomed to ever-changing fashions.

May I close this chapter with a wee "call back" message especially for returned or returning missionaries! It is this: Pray for guidance about your clothes! Since I began to do this, I have never been openly criticized, and have had many experiences when it seemed the Lord had very definitely guided. I will give just one concrete case.

When on furlough, a friend (who had a very strong will) insisted on choosing a hat for me. I did not like it, but to please her, I yielded. On returning home, I became convinced that it would be very wrong for me to wear it. Others could wear such a hat, but I simply could not. And my money for a hat was gone!

Having an old shape and a piece of good velvet, I shut myself in my room, and, after praying the Lord to guide my hands, I pinned the velvet onto the shape. When finished, I went to my daughter with it on. "O Mother!" she cried, "it is just perfect. I wouldn't change it!" What a comfort that toque was, and I knew the Lord had guided!

There is nothing too small for His love,
And nothing too great for His power.

~ end of chapter 11 ~
