

CLIMBING:
MEMORIES
of
A MISSIONARY'S WIFE
by
Mrs. Jonathan
ROSALIND GOFORTH
CHAPTER ONE -
A MOTHER'S INFLUENCE

And when by His grace ayont the bricht sun,
The race here is feenished, the vict'ry won,
Not mine be the meed of the Maister's "Weel dune,"
But Mither's.

- Ailsa Craig

The first picture can scarcely be called a memory; rather let it be just a *family legend*.

Rose Cottage, so called from the wealth of trailing roses enveloping it, was situated (so I was told) "as near the beautiful Kensington Gardens as could well be." Here, on the sixth of May, eighteen hundred sixty-four, an interesting, if miniature, reception was in progress.

The center of attraction, a wee mite of humanity but a few hours old, was surrounded by her seven brothers and three sisters. The extreme ruddiness of the baby's complexion led all quickly to decide that her name be called "Rosie" (alias Rosalind). The children were about to file out as they had entered when one of the older boys announced solemnly and impressively, "*Now, children, WE must bring this one up right!*"

Alas! the immediate years that followed, of almost constant petting on the one hand and merciless teasing on the other, of which the bringing up right consisted, developed to an alarming degree a naturally imperious and passionate nature.

But Mother understood! How often when others were clamoring that I should receive a severe chastisement for some grievous misdemeanor, Mother would draw me close to her, and, as I sobbed out for her alone to hear "O mother, I do, I do want to be good; I do want to be good" I could feel her arms draw me closer, as she whispered: "Some day, Rosie, some day it will all come right."

Then would follow the punishment, but in Mother's way, which was to have me to sit alone in the quiet drawing-room while I memorized Bible verses to suit the offence. If it had been an outburst of temper, it would be verses such as:

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

On one occasion when I had hurt seriously the arm of a schoolmate (she really had as bad a temper as I) my punishment was to master perfectly the entire "Love Chapter" (I Corinthians 13). I can even now recall the fear that came upon me when learning some of those searching passages giving the consequences, for example, of telling a lie, this when I had been caught in deception.

When about eight, possibly nine, years of age, my parents were puzzled as to how to break me of the habit of leaving tasks unfinished and slipping out to play; for I would much rather be playing with a neighbor's baby than drawing beside my father's easel. One day Mother took me alone and, opening her Bible at the Parable of the Talents, had me read the whole passage (Matthew 25:14-30). Though I cannot recall her words, a lasting impression was made upon me as she made vividly plain that some day GOD would require me to give an account of the talents He had given me. This plan of Mother's in using GOD's Word did help, for from that time on I tried to apply myself to drawing and other lessons.

One of the most precious memories of those early years was when Mother permitted me to accompany her to Montreal, some four miles west of our home. (My parents had come to Canada three years previously.) At such times, the first place visited was the old and interesting Bonsecours Market. In close proximity to the market was the great Notre Dame Cathedral. When finished with her marketing, Mother would say, "Now, child, we will go into the Cathedral; I need quiet." Mother was not a Roman Catholic nor had she any tendency that way. She was the mother of a very large family and upon her rested the responsibility of making, or trying to make, both ends meet on an artist's uncertain income. * Her problems were many. Can we wonder, therefore, that she craved for just such a haven as was to be found within the quiet, restful cathedral!

** John Bell-Smith was the first artist of note to settle in Canada. "The New Country," as it was then called. He sailed from London, England, the summer of 1866, with two of his eldest sons (the rest of the family following a year later). A warm reception awaited him on arriving in Montreal. A year later the Canadian Academy of Art was founded with Professor Bell-Smith as President. This later came to be the present Royal Canadian Academy.*

As we passed the holy water font just within the main entrance, where a priest always stood signing to "dip and cross," Mother would simply give a slight curtsy and pass on to a seat half way up to and in sight of the great altar. Never can I forget the hour, sometimes longer, when Mother knelt in perfect stillness, with face covered. Close beside her I sat, gazing in wonder at what to my child's fancy was all marvelous beauty and grandeur. Especially did the wonderful colors of the stained glass windows (the pride and glory of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada) appeal to all the artist in me. The "dim religious light," the quiet and solemn hush of the place, all had their disciplining influence on my restless, stormy nature.

Not only on those visits to the cathedral but in other ways and at other times I came to see mother's source of strength was in prayer and in definitely claiming some promise in the Word.

One of her favorite texts on which to take a stand was:

**"I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight;
I will break in pieces the gates of brass,
And cut in sunder the bars of iron."**

There were other blessed, moulding influences besides Mother. One only that stands out most clearly will be mentioned - that of a Sunday-school teacher. We children attended the "Cross" Sunday-school, so named because it was erected on the site where Jacques Cartier planted the cross on reaching the upper St. Lawrence. It was a mission carried on chiefly by Christian workers who came from the city in a large "picnic wagon" each Sunday.

No special word or lesson can I recall of this teacher; even her name is forgotten; but all down the years has remained the memory of the sweet fragrance of her Christ-like presence. Though but a child, and such an one as I have described, yet if anything, as storm or sickness, prevented me from going to Sunday school, the family knew not what to do with me, I would sob and cry so passionately. They did not know the secret; it was the longing just to watch this teacher's face and feel her tender, loving spirit; this was sufficient. I saw in her what I longed even then desperately to be. (O Sunday-school teachers, take courage!)

Then, when eleven years of age, something happened that seemed to open the door into a new world. Revival-meetings were being held in the Cross Sunday-school. (Though this story has been told briefly in *Goforth of China*, It can scarcely be omitted here. If GOD's Word is true. It is the greatest step one can take - "From death into life".) One evening I was allowed to accompany my oldest sister to the meeting. We sat in one of the front seats. The leader, Mr. Sandham took as his text John 3:16 and spoke with great tenderness of the love of GOD. As he repeated again and again the words, "GOD loves you," my whole soul responded with gratitude and love. And when he asked all those who wished to take JESUS CHRIST as their Lord and Master, fear of my sister and others kept me from rising. (Mr. Sandham became founder and editor of "*The Faithful Witness*," from which later sprang "*The Evangelical Christian*.")

That night I sobbed and prayed for hours. At last I promised the Lord that if He would let me live till the next evening, I would confess Him. The following evening, I went to the meeting so full of what I was going to do (I had told no one) that I could afterwards remember nothing of what preceded the call for decisions. Mr. Sandham had the invitation to stand only partly out when I was on my feet and remained standing so long that he had to sign for me to sit down! All the while I was standing my sister was tugging at my dress. On the way home, I was told how foolish it was for me to stand as I had, that I was too young to understand. But I knew CHRIST had received me; that I belonged to Him. In the years to come, this definite assurance of acceptance saved me many, many times from despair. And, oh, the joy of that "first love"! Would it had never grown cold!

When I was about twelve years of age, my father retired from his profession, and for seven years my sister, Gertrude, and I accompanied our parents on what might well be termed a migratory life. Among other places lived in temporarily were Toronto and Hamilton. In Hamilton we

attended the Church of the Ascension, where I came under the most blessed influence of Canon Carmichael and his wife, the latter being my Sunday-school teacher. When I told Mrs. Carmichael, immediately after my confirmation, how I longed to do something for my Savior, she gave me the ministry of visiting the Old Women's Home and entrusted me with small sums with which to buy little comforts for the old folks. I was very young for such work, scarcely fifteen, but, oh, it was all wonderful, and I was so proud to be trusted!

One day a frail, old body asked me to pray with her. I did, but was so nervous and frightened that I could not hear my own voice! I learned to love those dear, old souls, and my love was fully reciprocated.

The autumn of 1882 found us again settled in Toronto, when I at once entered the Art School. The period of three years that followed was a period of great unrest in my life. While I loved my art, for it was born in me, yet there was always the inner, secret longing for definite Christian service. I came to pray daily that a door might be opened for such.

Before going farther, I would like to give a brief memory of Father. My father and I were strolling one evening by a country roadside. He was over seventy and had retired from his artist profession. It was early summer, and wild violets were in full bloom. Father stopped and plucked a single violet. He remained examining it for so long that I became impatient and said, "Father, dear, do come on." Gently, he laid a restraining hand on mine as he said, almost in a tone of awe, "Child, just look at the exquisite beauty of this tiny flower - its color and delicate tracery! Oh, how wonderful it is!" As we started on, he exclaimed, with deep feeling, speaking as if to himself, "***What a wonderful artist GOD is!***"

I give the following incident as a fitting sequel: Many years later, when attending the Keswick (New Jersey) Convention, we were on our way to the evening meeting. As we were passing a group of young men, evidently engrossed in examining a beautiful water lily, one of them, to my surprise, stepped forward and placed the lily in my hand. A moment later, as they gathered around us, I found myself telling the story of Father and the wild violet. The young men listened with deep interest; I closed with, "If Father could see the work of the Great Artist in that tiny, wild violet, what would he have seen in this perfect and most exquisite lily?"

Months later I received a letter from one of these young men in which he said, "Those words, 'What a wonderful Artist GOD is;' remained with us, bringing a new and lasting vision of GOD." The letter enclosed a very lovely photograph of the Keswick lily pond in full bloom.

Two years after returning to Toronto, my father died. Shortly before he passed away, he asked me to sing for him that beautiful hymn, "Abide with me." Mother sat beside him as I played and sang through the whole hymn. When the last line of the last verse was reached, "*In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me,*" Father repeated each word softly but distinctly, then lapsed into final unconsciousness.

Mother and my eldest brother, Fred, had given Father their solemn promise that I would be sent to England for training in the Kensington School of Art. In view of this promise, Mother's later action may be better and more sympathetically understood.

Little did I dream as we entered the year eighteen eighty-five how completely the course of my life, as then planned, was to change before the year ran out.

Graduation from the art school was to come in May, when a coveted gold medal was to be presented by the Governor General of Canada. One pupil, Miss X, and myself were so far ahead of the others in the class, it was a foregone conclusion that one of us would get the medal. There is little doubt had I won it I would have been so elated the artist career would certainly have followed. But GOD planned otherwise.

Early in February, I was taken ill with inflammatory rheumatism. This was the third serious attack. For days my life hung in the balance. I was only half conscious and unable to move or be moved. Every joint in my body seemed on fire. Some weeks before, I had memorized the hymn, the first verse of which is:

How sweet the name of JESUS sounds
In a believer's ear;
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fears.

Words fail me to describe what that hymn meant to me through those days of agony. The words, fresh in mind, came without effort. While at times the whole six verses would come as soothing balm, it was the message of the first two lines of the last verse that brought to me the irresistible call to service. The words,

I would thy boundless love proclaim
With every fleeting breath

seemed burned into my soul. I came out of that valley of suffering determined to pray myself loose from the things that were forcing me to follow other than the path of Christian service.

It was then I began to pray that one wholly yielded up to the Lord and His service might be led to me.

Graduation time came, and while I was able to attend, I, of course, failed to win the gold medal, which was awarded to Miss X.

Preparations had begun for my going to England, for I had told no one, not even my mother, of my spiritual struggles and secret hopes, believing it was better to leave the Lord to work out all in His own way. Then, in a truly marvelous way, He brought into my life just what I had asked for, a man wholly yielded to GOD and His service. The story of how Jonathan Goforth and I met and the natural outcome has already been published (*Goforth of China*, chapter 3).

On looking back upon that time, the greatest wonder seems to be the rapidity with which events took place: the meeting with Mr. O'Brien at St. Peter's; a few days later his invitation to the workers' meeting of the Toronto Mission Union; the introduction of "Jonathan Goforth, our city missionary"; and a few days later the never-to-be-forgotten incident of examining the worn Bible. At that meeting, though the first I had attended, my name was included in the committee appointed to find a place and open a branch mission in the east end slums. Mr. Henry O'Brien

was chairman, while Jonathan Goforth was also included on the committee. Thus we were coworkers from the beginning.

To my great surprise, Mother's reaction to this slum work was most sympathetic. For weeks all went well. Then one day, as if uneasy, she expressed a wish for Mr. Goforth to come for supper Sunday evening. He came and Mother liked him; but that evening when I returned from the mission, Mother looked straight at me in a strange way and said, "Rosie, was the moon out tonight?" Everyone in the room had his eyes on me, and my embarrassment was more than I could bear, for I had to acknowledge, as I fled, that I did not know! (Jonathan Goforth had accompanied me home.)

The next morning, Mother came to me and said sternly, "This slum work is to cease at once. You are to get ready and leave for England without delay!"

I replied quietly, but firmly, "Mother, it is too late; I promised Jonathan Goforth last night to be his wife and to go to China!"

Poor Mother! She almost fainted! It is not necessary to give the details of the week that followed. Suffice it to say, Mother gave me the choice of obeying Father's dying wish or leaving home. For six weeks, I stayed with a brother in a distant city.

Then came a letter from my sister pleading with me to return, as Mother was sobbing day and night and seemed failing fast.

On reaching home, I was shocked at the change in Mother. She would not speak to me and seemed broken-hearted. My distress was now very great. Could it be GOD's will for me to break my Mother's heart? At last, one day, as I listened to her pacing her bedroom floor, weeping, I could stand the strain no longer and determined to find out GOD's will so plainly I could make no mistake. Going down to the parlor, where the large family Bible rested on a small davenport or desk, I stood for a moment crying to the Lord for some word of light. Then I opened the Bible at random, and the first words my eyes lit on were:

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16).

I knew at once GOD was speaking His will to me through these words, and in an instant the crushing burden was gone. Running to Mother's room, I begged her to hear what I had to say. Unwillingly, she unlocked the door and stood while I told her of my prayer and answer. For a moment only she hesitated, then with a cry I could never forget, she threw her arms about me, saying, "O my child, I can fight against you, but I dare not fight against GOD." From that moment till her death eighteen months later, Mother's heart was entirely with me in the life I had chosen.

It was a common belief at that time that no one could tell in this life whether or not he was saved. Mother held to this. But after she was gone, the following was found in her diary: "Give me to know, Lord JESUS, before I die, that I am saved." This prayer was answered only as she was passing. It was a glorious scene that seemed to open Heaven to us. Seven children gathered

round her bed and as the end drew near, Mother suddenly opened her eyes wide and gazed upwards. Then her expression changed from surprise to joy and then to that of glad welcome, when she raised her arms in greeting, and in a clear voice cried, "Now, evermore JESUS." At this instant a beam of light shone upon her face, and she was gone. Turning to each other, we exclaimed, "Did you see it?" and all, except one who was blind, had seen the shaft of Glory.

Many, many times in later years, when facing a group of heathen women, this story of Mother's entrance into the glory land has touched the hearts of hopeless women and opened the way for further teaching.

~ end of chapter 1 ~
