

**CLIMBING:**

MEMORIES

of

A MISSIONARY'S WIFE

by

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**CHAPTER FIVE**

**A MOTHER'S TRAGIC JOURNEY**

From silken self, O Captain free,  
Thy soldier, who would follow Thee:  
From subtle love of softening things;  
From easy choices, weakenings,  
From all that dims Thy Calvary,  
O Lamb of GOD, deliver me.

- Amy Carmichael

FOLLOWING the Boxer uprising, my husband returned to China in the autumn of 1901. Nine months later, toward the end of June, all preparations were complete for myself and five children (the eldest eleven years, the youngest ten months old) to leave for China on the first of July. A few days previously, the papers were full of the cruel massacre of the Stewart family and others with them. Some, fearing a fresh uprising in China, had written our secretary, Dr. R. P. McKay, urging that we be detained, but I felt very definitely we should keep to our original plans.

The following story of our two months' journey, during which I learned what it meant to be carried through each day by divine enabling, is given here with the hope it may help severely tried mothers and perhaps others.

On July 1, a large party gathered at the Union Station to see us off. We were to travel tourist, as more convenient with so many children. As the train was about to start, I heard ominous sounds from the farther end of the car. Listening, as a hand gripped mine through the window, I had just time to exclaim, "Whooping-cough!" and we were off.

My heart sank, on turning from the window, to find the car so crowded. We had to have three in a seat, and at one end of the car was a party of immigrants, more than one of whose children were, at that very moment, *very evidently* in the throes of whooping-cough!

It will be impossible to give the details of each day of the journey. I can but write a brief record of outstanding facts and leave the reader to use some imagination in reading between the lines.

The great heat, combined with car congestion, made the journey to Winnipeg trying even to those without children. On reaching that city, we found all tracks in the vicinity of the station blocked with delayed trains. Reports were rife of serious damage, through floods, to the railway ahead. But no one could learn anything definite. Many hours of waiting followed; then the forward movement began, though slowly, and continued with intermittent delays, till we reached Calgary. Here we were told to leave the car and be prepared for a wait of several days - possibly a week - as forty miles (as I now remember) of track had been washed out by floods.

I shall not attempt to describe the scramble and rush for hotels that followed. It was a case of everyone for himself. How could I, with five helpless children, not to speak of bundles and baggage, compete in time with the crowds? Oh, how I kept crying in my heart to the Lord to undertake for us! And He did, for it seemed to me nothing short of a miracle when I at last found myself in a fine, large, cool room in the hotel, with not a child or piece of baggage missing!

Later another passenger came to share the room with myself and four children, Paul having been accommodated elsewhere. The first few days were indeed a welcome time of rest. Then rumors floated about, changing with every hour! Handbags were packed and unpacked several times a day. At last one morning someone rushed in to say several packed trains had already gone and the last one would leave in half an hour!

RUSH is a word quite inadequate to describe what followed. On reaching the station with babies and baggage, I found the train about to start, and so crowded men were standing on the lowest step. I pleaded frantically that room be made for us. At first the answer from a dozen or more was, "Impossible." Then several kind-hearted ones undertook by squeezing and pushing to make room for us. The children were hauled up and a place made on the arm of a seat for me, where I could hold baby Constance. I had not the least idea what had become of the baggage! The heat of the packed car was almost suffocating. We traveled this way several hours, then the train stopped at a place where the bridge had sunk in the middle. Rough planks, had been placed over the tracks, some dangerously wide apart. We were told to leave the train and cross the bridge; that trains were waiting at the farther end. Considering the number of children I had, and the work of gathering up my baggage from various parts of the car, it is little wonder that by the time we were gathered outside, all the others had gone on ahead.

Realizing how futile it would be to attempt to cross without assistance, I begged a railway official for help. He looked at us steadily, for a few moments, taking all in-children, baggage and my distressed self - then, turning to a group of navvies by the tracks, he called in no uncertain manner, "Take this woman and her kids across the bridge!"

So we passed over to the other side, only to find the train gone. About twenty or more other passengers left behind like ourselves were seated on logs. These we joined, and for several hours waited there until a train came. My troubles would seem then to be over, but evident symptoms had appeared that at least three of the children -Ruth, Wallace, and Constance - had contracted whooping-cough. It was not until we reached Vancouver, however, that the real whoops began. So many children, whose parents were booked for the same steamer, had contracted the whooping-cough that the usual rule forbidding any with infectious disease on board was waived

and all were allowed to sail.

The boat had a full passenger list; I found four of the children and myself allotted to one small cabin. There was absolutely no other plan but to put Helen on the top berth, Ruth and Wallace below, Baby Constance on the short settee, and myself on the floor. Only in this way could I reach the children at night when a spasm of whooping came. Needless to say, prolonged, restful sleep was impossible. On the sixth day out, I collapsed! The ship's doctor ordered complete rest. The children were taken care of for a day; then I gathered them about me and trusted the Lord to carry me through. Through the days that followed till Japan was reached, and on through the fierce heat of the Inland Sea, I learned what it meant to "**go in the strength of the LORD God.**" (Psalm 71:16) Hope and courage came, too, as I thought of the dear father, so soon to meet us on our arrival in Shanghai.

When the ship dropped anchor at the mouth of the great Yangtze River, and the lighter from Shanghai drew near, the children were worked up to the highest pitch of excitement to see who could catch sight of Father first. But, oh, the disappointment when all meeting friends for the other passengers had come aboard, but no Father! Then came the general embarking on to the lighter. The journey up stream was so slow it was well on to 1 A.M. when the bund of Shanghai was reached. Leaving the children on the upper deck, out of the crush, I took my stand by the gangway so as to meet my husband as he came aboard. But just as the wharf was reached, through darkness, appeared the face of Mr. X of the home where we were to stay. Handing me a telegram over the side of the lighter he said: "Keep up your courage, Mrs. Goforth, there's rather bad news!" Of course I at once thought the worst - that my husband was dead; and for a moment or two all went black as I steadied myself by the rail. The telegram, however, read:

"Goforth typhoid Changte"

which meant that my husband was lying ill of typhoid fever over one thousand miles away, in our Interior Station of Changte and in the intense heat of mid-summer. Mr. X was asked to get the best nurse for the children as quickly as possible, for I realized that the breaking point was not far off.

On our way to the Home, which we reached about 2 A.M., we were told that cholera was raging in the foreign settlement as well as in the native city, the death toll reaching over fifty a day.

As the door closed on the double room allotted to us, I became aware of an overpowering odor! Not till the children were settled in their beds did I discover this came from the bed I was to occupy. What was discovered cannot be described. I turned deathly sick. Staggering to the outside balcony, I threw myself on the boards, pressing my face as close as possible to the rails. There I fell asleep from utter exhaustion. Awakened by the sun, I at once sought the housekeeper, who, on hearing what I had found, turned pale, saying, "Oh, those awful Chinese boys (male servants): I trusted them to prepare your room!" It was not till sometime later I learned a death had taken place there shortly before we arrived.

Mr. X, and indeed everyone, was wonderfully kind. For days I lay in a quiet, comparatively cool, private sitting-room. At first my strength was spent in trying to keep the couch and myself from going through the floor. Then, as promise after promise from GOD's wonderful Word was laid

hold on, peace came; I RESTED and learnt by experience the truth of these words: "**Underneath are the everlasting arms.**" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Later, the telling of this experience helped others suffering from one of the most terrible of physical ills - nervous exhaustion or prostration.

For a week we remained in Shanghai, trying in vain to get word from Changte. Then came the journey by coast steamer to Tientsin, via Chefoo, where Paul and Helen were to be left at the China Inland Mission Schools. On our vessel reaching Chefoo, Mr. Murray, of the schools, came aboard for them; but on learning the other children had whooping-cough, he said that Paul and Helen must go through a period of quarantine before being admitted. Just then Mrs. Hunter Corbett came aboard and saved the situation by offering to take charge of them during the quarantine period. The trunk containing Helen and Ruth's winter clothes was brought on deck (Ruth, too, was to have been left at the schools) for division of the clothes. But on opening the trunk, it was found to be a seething mass of black mould. The only possible explanation for this was that the trunk must have been dropped into water when crossing the flooded region on the Canada overland journey. As two thirds of the contents were ruined, they were thrown overboard. Mrs. Corbett again came to the rescue, promising to oversee the making of a new winter outfit for Helen. In less than an hour we were on our way northward.

The brief but exceedingly hard experience when getting from the steamer to the train at Taku resembled somewhat the rush from train to hotel at Calgary. We fully expected on reaching Tientsin that mail would be there telling of my husband's condition, but again came sickening disappointment. We did not know the cause till later. The Chinese postmaster at Peking kept sending all mail addressed "Goforth" back to Changte whether to or from that station!

For almost a month, through August, we remained in Tientsin, each day expecting and hoping for some word from Changte, but each day brought only silence. Then one day, without warning, the dear Father appeared! Just a mere shadow of himself, but HIMSELF. All the strain and hardness of the journey were forgotten in the reunion.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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