

**COUNSEL TO  
NEW MISSIONARIES**

**From Older Missionaries of the  
Presbyterian Church**



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## VI

### *THE HOME LIFE OF MISSIONARIES*

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**I**N these days of "advanced views" one hardly dares to profess the old-fashioned belief that a wife's first duty is to be a helpmeet to her husband, to assist and encourage him in his work, and to make his home to him the happiest spot in all the world. Yet this is what I do believe, and what I hope I have in some degree accomplished.

But the happiest missionary homes, as I have observed them during almost fifty years, have not been those where the wife has devoted herself exclusively to the care of her husband and children. On the contrary, they have been those where husband and wife have alike been working missionaries. If a woman is content to be merely a careful housekeeper and a faithful mother and nurse, she may indeed be conscious of having fulfilled a very sacred duty; but I think she has not reached the highest ideal. All this she might have done without leaving the other undone.

However, comparatively few women are satisfied not to make some effort for the good of the people they live among, and, as a rule, the homes of the missionaries, both of single women and married, are real "object lessons"—very bright spots in the surrounding darkness, where often heathen women learn for the first time the meaning of the word home.

First of all a missionary's home should be a place

where the love of God reigns supreme, where in work, rest or recreation the joy of the Lord and the consciousness of His presence are our strength; and it ought to be a centre from which good influences radiate in all directions. There heathen men and women should always be made welcome. There should, if possible, be a bright, cheerful, native reception room, where they can be entertained and feel at home, as they do not in our foreign rooms.

Visits from the natives, especially from women, take a great deal of time, and are so barren of immediate results, that one often feels that they do not pay for the exhaustion of mind and body which ensues. Yet few kinds of work are more important. Returning these calls or seeking to extend our acquaintance among women is a kind of work requiring a great amount of patience and physical strength, together with a knowledge of the habits and customs of the people. Without this knowledge we are apt to be guilty of what the Chinese consider great rudeness, and shall probably do more harm than good by our efforts to be sociable.

One plan which I have tried for getting a hold on the women and girls is gathering them into industrial classes. My object is not primarily to teach them to sew, nor indeed to be industrious, but merely to get the chance of teaching them.

Whether the natives should often be invited to eat with us at our tables is an open question. If they dislike foreign food as much as I, for one, dislike the native, they would be glad to be spared the infliction. In China, I doubt if the men of our families ought to sit at table when we are entertaining native women, or if foreign women ought to appear when men guests are being entertained.

Young women at least make no mistake in being very punctilious in observing the customs of the country.

In the open ports nothing which the foreigner can do now greatly surprises the natives, so used have they become to balls, picnics, races and sports of all kinds where men and women appear together in easy intercourse. A most important question for missionaries to settle is "What concessions ought we to make to the customs of the country we have adopted as our own?" In China men and women do not sit together at table. A woman walking the street leaning on her husband's arm is never seen. Ladies do not entertain gentlemen callers. And so in innumerable instances our foreign customs come into conflict with those of all Orientals.

Our costume does not seem to the Chinese as modest and beautiful as their own, nor perhaps is it. Shall we then adopt theirs, as has been done by many missionaries? I think not; for what we gain by this in certain respects we lose in others. A lady by wearing an outside native garment, or a loose wrap of her own may at any time avoid disagreeable criticism. But what can be said of the dress of a foreign man! I am sure I do not know. But as the world over it has been adopted by every superior race, and has some advantages over eastern costumes, its stiff lines and want of grace must be condoned, and the natives must get used to it.

One thing which as missionaries we ought never to forget is that the natives are not to be blamed for watching our conduct, and questioning our motives. For this reason, if for no other, certain amusements common at home, such for instance as dancing and cards, are never allowed in a mission-

ary's family. Others, such as tennis, croquet and the like are common, though in the eyes of the Chinese they are undignified if not positively immoral. Personally, I think I should taboo all such games in places where the curious eyes of the natives—strangers at least—could witness and comment on them. But in so doing I should probably find myself in a minority of one! I am quite willing to admit that the importance of vigorous and agreeable exercise makes these games almost a necessity. But certainly in interior stations, especially in the beginnings of work, the greatest care should be exercised in all such matters.

As is well known, the line of separation between missionaries and other foreign residents in the East is very broad, and the result is a marked estrangement between the two classes. I do not think missionaries are entirely free from blame for this. They hold themselves aloof, possibly sometimes saying by their manner, "I am holier than thou," which, though often literally true, is not always so; for there are good religious people outside of the missionary communities. We blame them for not being in sympathy with missions, yet take little pains to make them so. I believe that a good proportion of the foreigners in China, at least of the women, are religious—that is, as much so as "the rank and file" of church members at home. They are in great danger from the adverse influences which meet them on every side. Have we as missionaries no duties toward them? I think it possible for us, without encroaching on our more direct work, to be on most friendly or even intimate terms with members of the foreign communities; not, perhaps, participating in many social functions, and certainly

not entertaining in the luxurious way so common in the East, but to be true friends, sympathizing in their joys and sorrows, and at all times trying to help them to lead brave and earnest Christian lives. In such intercourse anything like "pious talk," and the least approach to "cant" which is so distasteful to any one not accustomed to it must be avoided. On the other hand there is real danger of our intercourse degenerating into mere frivolity, doing no good to ourselves or any one else.

A small missionary establishment, and a very meagre salary, would prevent any one without private means, from mingling very extensively in the society of the foreign settlements, even if he desired to do so.

The place which should be given to music and other accomplishments, such as drawing and painting, is also rather a difficult question, and one on which directly opposite views are held. Suppose a young woman with an unusual gift for music, after years of careful training and great expense, has become proficient in it; shall she when she enters on her life-work as a missionary, give this all up? In my opinion the answer to this question should be emphatically no. Should she do so it would be burying a talent which ought to be used for the sake of Him who gave it. Moreover it would be sure to cause shrinkage and deterioration of character, and consequently loss of power to do good work in other lines. Moreover it is voluntarily relinquishing one means of giving pleasure to others and of making cheerful the homes which from the necessities of the case must be comparatively uninviting.

No one would deny the importance of music as a means of doing good to the natives. For teaching

the Christians, whether for schools or church, or merely as a means of entertaining visitors, it is of great use. But for these purposes "a little goes a long way," and does not require much time or practice. If a person is not truly musical, by which I mean that she does not care enough for it to be willing to take for it many of the hours she would otherwise give to reading, sewing, out of door games, or visiting her neighbors—such an one I think need not force her music farther than to keep enough of it to use in her strictly missionary work. But to the few who love music as one of the dearest things in all the world, I am not afraid to give the advice to keep it up from the time you leave your teachers at home, until you are called to join in the harmonies of heaven, which possibly you will understand and appreciate as others cannot.

During the earlier years of missions in China the duty of economy was practised more rigidly than it is now. More than one family suffered both in mind and body from the want of nourishing food; and this not always from necessity but from motives of economy, or the belief that it was a meritorious thing, or if not quite that, that a certain amount of asceticism was required in every good missionary. This belief prevails still to some extent. I have lately received a letter from the Rev. W. A. P. Martin, D.D., LL. D., in which occurs the following: "One of the saddest instances of mistaken asceticism is that of the eminent Scotchman, Rev. W. C. Burns, who fell a victim to false notions of economy. He is in fact reported to have said during his last illness that if he recovered he would change his mode of life."

It is my opinion that people living in these east-

ern countries—China, Japan and Korea—where servants are plenty and comparatively cheap, are inexcusable if their homes are ill-kept and their tables uninviting. Even a moderately good house-keeper can with care provide plenty of nourishing food, and if she is a person of refined tastes, she will make some effort to beautify the “social board.”

Even more important, I regard it, that she should make these hours, snatched from the work of the busy day, times of mental refreshment and delight. Here, if anywhere, the house-mother or hostess will do her best in the art of conversation, giving out from her own stores of reading or memory, and drawing out from others still more. How often in the years which are passed has one tired man been interested and diverted by a resume of some book which his wife had been reading! It may have been from Livingston or Stanley, or the life of Bishop Patteson; or just as probably it was a good story of which she gave him the plot from beginning to end with as much of detail as time allowed. The wearied brow would lose its lines and a merry laugh would show that she had not failed in her purpose; while may be long afterwards she would find that her husband to all intents knew about as much of the book as she had retained in her memory. I certainly do not advise making meal times a time for mental effort, but even that would be better than the totally inane, uninteresting occasions they are apt to become, especially in missionary homes, where monotony often is quite as injurious as malaria or contagion.

Of course, I do not limit the importance of good conversation to the time spent at table. Far from it. I am sure it is a much neglected duty at other



times. The indolent quiet in which many women allow themselves to indulge seems to me not quite the admirable thing it is sometimes thought, and it certainly does not add to the brightness of home.

In the early days of missions each young man coming abroad brought with him a library as well filled as that of any young clergyman at home. Hebrew, Greek, theological works—heavy tomes arranged on the shelves always in beautiful order, because seldom touched, stood ever after staring reproachfully at us, who so sadly neglected them. Present-day libraries seem more inviting. How much time it is right to spend in reading is a question which each person must settle for himself or herself. Certain it is that the missionary who does not read, and read with a purpose, must deteriorate. The importance of faithful Bible study “goes without saying.” If we allow our missionary work, even what seems most imperative, to interfere with this, our Christian characters must be cramped and imperfect, and our souls will suffer. If there is time for nothing else let this never be neglected.

But with regularity, punctuality, and a judicious division of the day, every one who has a real fondness for intellectual pursuits, can find time for a certain amount of study either of languages, science, or whatever one craves, and also for “light reading.” I am sorry for the missionary who gets no pleasure from works of fiction. Not even the best books of travel, history or biography can so completely take us out of ourselves and make us forget our uncongenial surroundings. A home where such books are not allowed I have generally found to be rather a dull one, where mirth, wit and ready repartee are conspicuous only by their absence.

Few are the homes in any land where sickness and sorrow do not at some time make their entrance. The sanitary conditions, too hard study, overwork, together with the monotony of life in most eastern countries are by no means favorable to good health, and there are few foreign residents who do not have to serve an apprenticeship at one time or another in nursing the sick.

When I first came to China fifty years ago the profession of "trained nurse" was almost unknown. We looked after our sick as best we could; and I am glad to think that by devotion and faithfulness, we made up in some measure for what we failed in from ignorance. But good lessons and experience in nursing are at all times invaluable. I cannot recommend too strongly the importance to either a man or a woman looking forward to being a missionary, of learning to take care of the sick. Not every one need become a trained nurse, but every one who wishes it may obtain some lessons and practice in the art of nursing the sick. No other accomplishment will prove more useful in the long run; and it also gives one much influence among the natives.

My own home has been many times a temporary hospital, and I speak from actual experience when I urge the importance of a knowledge of nursing.

It was once my privilege to entertain an American gentleman, who will forgive my mention of his name—Dr. Phraner—whose knowledge of minister's manses in the United States has been exceptional. He assured me that the homes of missionaries were not as commodious and good—on an average—as those of clergymen at home. Yet it is well known that our houses and way of living have

been most severely criticized by travelers and globe-trotters as unsuitable and extravagant. Did these critics realize more fully our circumstances, I think they would judge us more kindly.

Those of us who live in central stations or the open ports are constantly obliged to "use hospitality." This, if our houses are large enough, and our servants are well trained, in most cases, is not a burden, but rather a pleasure. While my present home was being built we lived in a four-roomed small house, where five times in one year we gave up our bedroom to guests—once for a month—and made the study do duty as a sleeping room, to the great detriment of our work. The experiment convinced us that for us a house double the size was none too large. About the same time there was another person who built his house just as small as he could possibly do with, because thus it was unlikely that he should be burdened with guests. Perhaps once or twice during the passing years I have thought him wise, and envied him, but not often.

Then comes the question of furnishing and style of living. I have already emphasized the importance I attach to making the missionary's home attractive, while at the same time avoiding scrupulously all ostentation and extravagance. In the nature of the case there will be a great difference in the houses of the same mission; one having an air of refinement and beauty, another the same in size and kind remaining to the end destitute of ornament, the walls without pictures, the floors bare or ill kept, no musical instruments with their sweet sounds and suggestions, and, worse than all, a general air of untidiness. The third house, and the kind most common, will be neither one of the above,

but somewhat between the two. Individuality stamps itself upon houses, just as it does on one's garments. Even the house which seems to us most unattractive is so superior in most respects to the next-door Chinese neighbor that to him there is perhaps little perceptible difference. In matters of this sort much must be left to the individual taste, judgment and conscience.

If punctuality and regularity in the conduct of affairs are important elsewhere, they are doubly so in a missionary's home, and their absence is soon felt. Time seems of little value to Eastern peoples, and it is wasted with surprising prodigality. But while this is so it is equally true that it is not difficult to train them to habits of punctuality; and it is the missionary's fault if breakfast is late, luncheon delayed, and dinner any time between daylight and dark, while family prayers are moved about to suit the convenience of master or servants. I consider it as most important that young missionaries from the very first should regard punctuality and regularity in the light of duties never to be neglected.

The limits of this chapter will not allow me to suggest particular lines of work or methods. But I wish negatively to point out one or two things. Except in extreme cases of illness no one ought to encroach very much on the time and strength of the stronger members of the mission. There is room here for self-denial; and, as a rule, most cheerfully and willingly have missionaries borne it. Another thing which more particularly concerns married women is this: Let them never be clogs nor hindrances to their husbands. If for instance the husband's duties call him to be often absent from home

on long itinerating tours, on which she cannot accompany him, let her on no account weaken his courage by her wails of loneliness. If a woman cannot do itinerating work herself she ought at least to be willing to "stay by the stuff," thankful that she in her comparative uselessness has a brave soldier to send out to fight in the great battle with sin. That this means sacrifice no one knows better than the writer of these words.

The sin of *overwork* is not confined to missionaries, but I think it is more dangerous for them than for people in Western lands, who necessarily and in spite of themselves get a certain amount of recreation and relaxation every day. A missionary, to begin with, has the language to acquire, and this often taxes both mind and body beyond endurance. After that come the long weary years of teaching, preaching and incessant "giving out," with little opportunity to repair waste. But if the home is what it ought to be it will in a great measure make up for all this.

As I glance back over the pages of this chapter I can but notice that I have written too exclusively for women—a natural consequence, perhaps, of my old-fashioned notions of the impropriety of a woman's presuming to attempt to teach men! But perhaps I may be allowed a few words of suggestion in closing. No one can realize more deeply than I do that the happiness of home depends chiefly upon the man who is its head. It is in his power to make or mar it. No amount of work, however important, no preoccupation of mind, no theories as to different spheres of labor, can absolve him from his paramount duties in his home. It is by no means enough that a man should be a faith-

ful, hard working missionary. It is a sad confession to make, but a true one, that there have been missionaries who have done their duty everywhere but in their own families. Mistaken I believe them to have been, but conscientious no doubt. If ever there is a place where divine guidance is needed surely it is here; and well it is for us that we have the promise, "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."