A Departure in Missionary Work

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"THE hard part is leaving Mattie," said the missionary's wife. She was a brave little woman. She had known what it was to face frenzied mobs and deadly pestilence, to match her faith and wit against the cruel cunning of Oriental magnates, without losing her courage. But now her chin quivered like a grieved child's.

"Very natural, I'm sure," said Mrs. Durand, politely. "But that is the lot of all parents. The young birds leave the nest when their wings are grown." Mrs. Durand had no children, or perhaps she would not have spoken with such serene philosophy.

"My husband says I ought to be ready to trust Mattie to the Lord," the missionary's wife continued. "And I tell him that the Lord trusted her to us. If ever duties seem to conflict, Mrs. Durand, it's when a missionary is choosing between what he owes his work, and what he owes his children."

Mrs. Durand set down her teacup. The dismay on her face was so unmistakable that the missionary's wife laughed.

"Oh, we've chosen, Mrs. Durand! We are going to stand by the work. There doesn't seem any other way. The new Girls' School is in just that critical stage when a change couldn't help being disastrous. We've won the confidence of the people. We know just what we want to do and can see our way pretty clearly to doing it. There's no such thing as turning back now. And I should be so happy if it wasn't for Mattie."

"Let me fill your cup," said Mrs. Durand, and her sense of relief gave a new quality to her customary gracious hospitality. The woman had almost taken her breath away. The new Girls' School, established after such long opposition, was something in which she was profoundly interested; and yet the missionary's wife had spoken as if she had been tempted to abandon her post, all because she was unwilling to leave behind her daughter Mattie, who was to pursue her studies in America. Mrs. Durand could not understand such an impulse. The quivering chin of the other woman and the mist in her eyes awoke in her a vague annoyance. "But we all have our weak points," thought Mrs. Durand, excusingly, while aloud she urged: "Oh, really, let me give you another cup of tea."

The missionary's wife allowed her cup to be refilled. "I hope you'll keep a little oversight of Mattie," she said, appealingly. "Life here is so different from anything she's been used to. I know the school is a good school, and the matron impressed me as a very capable person; but Mattie's always had her mother. And if you would give her a little mothering now and then." This time a tear splashed down into the tea cup, and the missionary's wife fumbled for her handkerchief.

"Oh, yes, to be sure," said Mrs. Durand, hastily, and she was relieved when a caller was announced. The missionary's wife dabbed her eyes furtively, and joined immediately in the changed conversation. It was not till late that night that Mrs. Durand found time to wonder if she had committed herself to anything objectionable. "'Mother' her," repeated Mrs. Durand, half indignantly. "Does the woman expect me to look after her mending and her manners?" It was the more unreasonable of the missionary's wife because she knew the extent of Mrs. Durand's missionary activities, and the multiplied duties resulting from her official connection with several organizations.

But the promise, if promise it were, was not redeemed for many months. The fall work was beginning in earnest, and Mrs. Durand, as president of one missionary society and corresponding secretary of the district organization, found her

hands more than full. Once or twice at church she caught sight of the missionary's daughter, and resolved to invite her to dinner, but the convenient time for extending the invitation did not present itself. Meanwhile from across the water came word of the successful opening of the new Girls' School. In her annual address Mrs. Durand dwelt on this as an occasion for especial thanksgiving, emphasizing the influence of a trained, Christian womanhood in the homes of the Orient.

The missionary's daughter dropped out of Mrs. Durand's mind till one memorable Saturday afternoon. She had been down town to look after some neglected shopping, and when she took the car for home her attention was attracted by two young people who occupied the seat directly in front. The young man's hand rested familiarly against his companion's shoulder, and Mrs. Durand said to herself, "What an obnoxious person!" and gave her attention to the view through the window. But she could not as easily close her ears to the conversation between the two, the labored compliments, the painful attempts at wit, the unprepossessing assurance of the young man, and the girl's hardly audible replies.

"Well, I guess I'd better leave you here," said the young man at length. "Say, I'll see you Saturday, won't I?"

"I don't know," said the girl. She looked out of the window, and her ears reddened painfully.

"Oh, come now," urged the young man. "You're not going to keep me standing on the street corner waiting for you all the afternoon. You couldn't be so mean as that. We'll go out to the park and see the sights."

"Maybe," said the girl. "I won't promise." But her eyes followed his vanishing figure, and Mrs. Durand knew she would be there at the appointed time. "I should like to know," thought the president of the missionary society, with the quick censoriousness of a childless woman, "where her mother is."

A moment later she knew. For as the girl turned her head to see the last of her late companion, Mrs. Durand saw that it was Mattie. And all at once she understood what the missionary's wife had meant. A girl on the brink of womanhood, with her pathetic ignorance and unformed standards — how sorely she needed a mother!

Mrs. Durand sought Mattie out a few days later, and the girl accepted her invitation to dinner with outspoken pleasure which was artlessly childish and correspondingly winsome. Mrs. Durand's ability as a hostess was well known, but she had never exerted herself to please more than now. The missionary's daughter responded to these advances as a flower to the sunshine. For the first time, almost, since her own girlhood had passed, Mrs. Durand was given a glimpse into a girl's heart.

She sent her to the piano at last because she wanted a chance to think. Across the water Mattie's father and mother were giving their lives up to helping the girls of the Orient, breaking the dearest of earthly ties that they might not be false to their heavenly mission. And was it any more than fair that the Christian church at home should guard this one girl left without a mother's care? Even the work she was doing for the approaching district meeting could not appease Mrs. Durand's conscience. That half-forgotten, carelessly-spoken promise rose before her accusingly.

"Mattie," said Mrs. Durand, suddenly, "how would you like to stay here with me instead of at the school dormitory? I have no daughter. Perhaps we might help each other."

The music book fell on the piano keys with a crash, and Mattie was on her knees beside her. "Stay in this lovely home with you?" cried the missionary's daughter. "Do you really mean it?" and then she hid her face against Mrs. Durand's shoulder and cried. Something new stirred in the woman's heart as she looked down on that golden brown head. She would do for Mattie what Mattie's mother was doing for the girls across the sea.

The confidence she was anxious for came a few days after Mattie was installed in her new quarters. "There's a friend I'd like to have call, if you don't mind," Mattie said, flushing vividly and looking away. "One of the girls introduced me to him in the drug-store, and I met him afterward when I was out walking. You know the rules at the dormitory are very strict about callers, and the girls used to meet their friends outside. I did it several times, but I never really liked it."

"I do not like it, either," said Mrs. Durand, gravely. "Have your friend call at the house, by all means. I shall be glad to meet him."

When she came downstairs a few evenings later to be introduced to the obnoxious person of the street-car episode, she knew that the victory was hers; for a more discomfited young man than the one who rose from the divan and grasped her hand could with difficulty be imagined. His assurance had departed. In the harmonious furnishings of Mrs. Durand's drawing room he was clearly an incongruous element, and Mrs Durand's courteous attentions seemed only to add to his embarrassment. As she watched his attempts to regain his old composure, Mrs. Durand was almost sorry for him.

It was not long after she left the two young people to themselves that Mattie stole into the library.

"He's gone, Mrs. Durand."

"Has he, indeed?"

"Yes, and I don't know as he'll come again. Mrs. Durand," with a queer little sob, "I don't know as I want him to come again."

Mrs. Durand patted her head, wisely judging that her silence was likeliest to win further confidences.

"I always thought he was so jolly and nice," Mattie continued, "but tonight he wasn't nice a bit. I felt — yes, I felt ashamed of him. He wanted me to meet him down town again, and when I said no he was very disagreeable. Mrs. Durand, I'm afraid he isn't a gentleman." Having announced this surprising discovery, Mattie indulged in a few tears over a shattered illusion. "I don't see," she sobbed, "why it's so hard to know what people are really like."

Mrs. Durand suppressed a smile, and made her thanksgiving a silent one. "It is not strange that a young girl should be mistaken in a stranger," she said, soothingly. "And that is why it is best for her to be guided by the advice of older friends. Don't cry, dear. Just be careful not to make another such mistake."

Weeks after, a letter came for Mrs. Durand bearing an Oriental postmark. "You don't know what a satisfaction it gives me," wrote the missionary's wife, "to know that Mattie is under your charge. She is just at the age when influences mean so much, and mistakes are so fatal. I can throw myself into my work with redoubled energy now that my mind is relieved concerning my little girl."

The president of the missionary society put the letter away very carefully. She had not been mistaken. The other things were important, and she could not be excused for neglecting them, but this work had the first claim upon her.

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