

**COUNSEL TO  
NEW MISSIONARIES**

**From Older Missionaries of the  
Presbyterian Church**



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# I

## THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF DIVINE VOCATION

*By the Rev. Daniel McGilvary, D. D., of Laos*

**S**OME words of counsel for our new missionaries!" A young man might give them with confidence. When he has passed his seventy-fifth year, he will do it with diffidence. The most startling chapter would probably be his own blunders and mistakes, but probably he might bury them. But all the same I will draw as largely from my own failings and defects as from my successes, more from my ideals than from past attainments.

But, first of all, let me give you a hearty welcome, and most sincerely congratulate you on your choice of your life work.

My first advice would be, like the Great Apostle to the Gentiles, "*Magnify your office!*"

We shall presume that your choice has been made after deep heart-searchings, and earnest prayer, and against strong temptation to other lines and fields of work. Such victories, when gained, are likely to be permanent. They give stronger assurance of a divine call. You may not be many years in most fields, before the enemy will suggest that you missed your calling. Well will it be for you if, in some desponding moments, you be not tempted to wonder if, after all, you might not be doing more good if preaching to your own people in your own tongue than in spending use-

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less years in acquiring an uncouth and difficult language, to preach doctrines distasteful to those who do not thank you for coming. No Christian, much less a Christian missionary, can live on past experiences, but at times it may be both comfortable and wise to fall back on them. The victory will be well nigh gained if you can confidently assert, as Bishop Thoburn could to his sister, when tempted not to return to his field in India, "Yes, I was never more sure of anything than of my call to India."

You will find, my brother and sister, that it is a heart experience that you will need to support you in a life work on a foreign field. You do not even have the romance of a four months' voyage, in a small brig, with poor accommodations and a cross captain, as many of your predecessors had. True, there are yet to be found some unevangelized regions where you may still be many months without hearing a word from loved ones at home. Should you be called to be a pioneer in such fields, let me assure you that God's gracious promises and presence will not fail you. But more probably it will be your lot to work in fields where the novelty has worn off, to do the humble work of reconciling husbands and wives, or healing dissensions among Christians,—a duty, alas! not unknown in Christian lands. I pray you to bear with such weaknesses, and be not too much discouraged, if needed among those just emerging from the darkness and breaking the chains of hereditary weaknesses entailed by centuries of ignorance and superstition. Some of you are physicians, and you will not be surprised to find the binding of heathen wounds and ulcers not less revolting to sensitive.

natures than Christian wounds. You have already learned that the Master was sent to heal the broken limbs as well as the broken-hearted. Only ease the bodily pains, and you can preach any doctrine you please to the sufferer.

I see before me young women from refined homes and surroundings, luxuriously supplied with all that ministers to taste and comfort. Knowing, as you cannot yet know, the opening fields and the great work awaiting you, we bid you a hearty welcome. You may have your sensibilities tried in visiting, as I trust you will, among the homes of poverty and want. You will find, as the Master did before you, that it was the common people who heard Him gladly, and that it will be from among them that your converts will largely come. When Christianity has not yet become popular, you will not be surprised that not many mighty, not many noble are called. But I remember that the history of Christian missions abounds with numerous examples of many from the highest stations in life, who have adorned the rank from which they came, by the most self-denying service on foreign fields, as well as in home lands. The stoop from the throne above to the manger in the stable puts to shame every other sacrifice possible or conceivable. And as with the Master so with the servants, when either heaven or home has been left for saving the lost, what matters it, whether we find them in huts or in palaces? With reverence be it said, even Christ Himself was never so great as in His lowest humiliation. "*Therefore* doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep." It is the Lamb that was *slain* that is worthy of all glory and honor, dominion and power. The Master was

loved for His sacrifice. The servant is honored in following His steps. And I intensely realize that no other advice will be of any avail, unless you have brought to your calling an exalted idea of its dignity and responsibility. If you have, not much more advice will be needed. It can be no perversion of Scripture to exhort you, to give *all diligence* to make your calling and election sure.

It can have none other than a salutary effect on you, always to remember that you are Christ's chosen ambassadors to preach unto the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ, in posts of greatest difficulty, sometimes of danger, always of responsibility. Of all the foolish attempts ever made, none so futile as the attempt to overthrow the kingdom of the strong man armed, in his own stronghold, by any power short of divine. But he was seen as lightning falling from heaven. The cross has despoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly. By an eternal decree in the counsel of eternity, the nations have been given to the Son for an inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. That is the divine origin, the divine authority and the divine assurance of success in the work in which the Church is engaged, and in the labor of which and to the honor of which he is calling you. So, of all enterprises, yours is the most certain. It matters not to what race you go, or what its degree of civilization or degradation. Has not history wonderfully confirmed the promise? In what race of people, language or clime has a missionary spent a devoted life in vain? So long and so surely as you rely on the word and promise and oath of God,

there can be no failure. Anything else will prove a refuge of straw. I have often wondered what can sustain a missionary other than this eternal counsel ordered in all things *and sure*, that Christ has a people given to Him in every land; that all that hath been given to Him shall come to Him; and that him that cometh, He will in no wise cast out. Will that assurance cut your nerve or strengthen it? Work confidently because God works, because sure of success and sure of a reward.

*Nothing could make the external call stronger.* It comes from many more millions of men to-day than when first heard in Troas. *Come over and help us*, from arctic snows and tropical plains. *The inward call* is one that you must settle yourself in your closet with your open Bible, the Divine Command, and a lost world before you.

Presuming that you have settled your call, and that you will continue to give all diligence to make it sure, and that you have diligently prepared yourself for it, as far as your literary and theological course can prepare you, may I still insist on one other preparation *above all others*? And remember again that you cannot have too much of secular learning, and never was there a subject to which it was so well applied as in making the cross of Christ plain even to the ignorant savage. Angelic tongues cannot do it justice. But remember still, my brother, that however gifted you may be in speech, how manifold soever your stores of learning, yet there is one other more important still. Even the divine Teacher Himself did not enter on His work till He was *baptized with the Holy Ghost*. "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also

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may be sanctified through the truth." And if a long service, in the work on which you are entering, gives me any right to offer advice, here you have it in a nutshell, *first, middle and last, Go as the Master did in the power of the Holy Ghost.* And if I were assured that this one counsel was heeded, I might go no further. The adversary may not quail before your logic; he quails before your prayers when "he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." He would doubtless say to the godless missionary, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?"

In the request for this paper some advice drawn from experience in long-protracted touring was hinted at. But then circumstances are so varied in different fields that what would apply to one would not be appropriate to another. My experience in tropical forests, over mountains, on elephants, or on foot, would be of no service to Brother Egerton Young, on his dog-cart sledges, among the Esquimaux of Baffin's Bay or the frozen regions of arctic snow and ice. But the *consecration* that will sustain the Moravian missionary in Greenland, will sustain you in Africa, Turkey, China, or Laos. And it is alike needed in all. You know that it is characteristic of the Saviour's teaching, that He laid down great principles that are to guide our lives, as distinguished from Mohammed or Buddha and all ethical teachers who gave specific rules *ad nauseam*. In this He showed his omniscience. Room is left for the application of these rules, to meet every individual case in every condition and station in life. Had He taken a different course, and descended to particulars, the field would have been boundless and the task hopeless.

But I *would* like to say a few words on evangelistic *tours* before closing. Whether taken in boats, dog-carts, or on elephants, *be sure to take them*. Whether your work be in large emporiums, translating the Scriptures or teaching, it will be to the advantage of any one to spend two months of the year in the great country, its towns and villages, visiting, if possible, in the homes of the people. I believe you will return better prepared for any kind of work. Rusticating will be a change from the strain of other work. It may save the necessity for a home trip.

In large cities you see the conventional man dressed up as he wishes to appear to one whom he is waiting to fleece or outwit in a bargain. Go to the country to see nature—man as he is. There, too, you will hear the language and idioms spoken by the great body of the people who must use your translations. Whether you adopt them or not, you will be a better translator thereby. For the best work in translating one must be versed in the language both of the people and of the books. And, last but not least, in all probability it is there that you will find most of God's chosen people, his precious jewels. Jerusalem was the capital, but it was Galilee where our Lord spent most of His time and from which He gathered most of His disciples. If you will excuse a personal reference, Chiengmai, the Laos capital, is neither a very large nor, comparatively, a very wicked city, and altogether, in thirty-seven years, I have spent months and years in laboring in it. It was necessary labor and, from some standpoints, not unsuccessful. Yet, of the more than fifteen hundred baptized members of the First Church I can almost count on the fingers of my two



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hands the Christians residing in the limits of the city proper. And I would not be surprised if some of the masters and rulers there have received their clearest ideas of Christianity from their dependents—Christians living in the country. They learn from them what the missionary is and what he is doing, and in them see Christianity as I want them to see it in its power over their own people. Said a governor of a large province once to me: "If all your Christians are like —— I would wish all my people to become Christians."

But no fast rule can be laid down. Fields are not alike. The qualifications of the workers are not the same. But I believe you will not make a mistake by spending a portion of your time in the country villages. Take a small district. Become interested in the people themselves, in their work and their children. Note the names of those most interested. Pray for them and repeat the visits. If you have a talent for remembering names and faces, *cultivate* it. People like to be recognized and called by their own names. I have lost a great deal by not being able to call the names of people that I ought to know. Not indirectly connected with this is the question of our general bearing to the natives. In most eastern nations you will be tempted to regard them as your inferiors. But do not look down upon them. "Behold, God is mighty and despiseth not any." Put yourself in their place and imagine if you would be willing to be *converted* by a man who treated you with contempt. The lowest races have some traces of the divine image in them yet, and, after all, who hath made us to differ? And, as Dr Hodge used to tell us, "the

difference between two grains of sand is not very great."

But I have already gone beyond my limit, and must stop. I will simply mention one or two other points. Dread, above all things, the evils of dissensions in your own body. Stations, possibly missions, have been rent asunder or broken up by dissensions among those who have left their homes to teach the religion of love. You may not find all your associates always lovely. Be lovely and loving yourself. It is not always the clearest eye that sees the most notes in the brother's eye.

The first year is largely devoted to study, but not too exclusively. It is a mistake to have nothing to do beside; ask for some work that you can call your own. Take a class in the Sabbath or day school. Begin to pray by learning the Lord's Prayer; pronounce the benediction. Do *something* in the line of work. The longer you put off the beginning, the harder it will be. Pride will come in at last. What is to be your demeanor toward foreigners, people of your own race? Nowhere is there greater need for sanctified *common sense* than on the mission field.

In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God.

I will let you find out for yourself the fallacy of your preconceived idea that it must be very easy to live a holy life on a mission field. Every condition in life has its temptations. In every one, grace is an exotic. Experience has shown that a high degree of consecration may be attained in all. God is to make all grace abound. That His grace may be sufficient for you, and that you may be spared

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to do a great and useful work, is our prayer for you all.

*Study the Word—live the Word—preach the Word—disseminate the Word*, and read Isaiah iv. 10-11 for the result.

May the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men. Broad charity, deep sympathy and love for the people are very essential on mission fields.