

The Master is Merciful

In December 1926, I was elected girl class speaker for the Moody Bible Institute graduation exercises. I prayed for a message and

took as my theme "The Print of the Nails," based on Thomas' words in

John 20:25: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and

put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his

side, I will not believe" (KJV).

The heathen around us have not much respect for ordinary Christianity. Today, the unbelieving world seems to say to the Christian

church, "If it costs you nothing, what proof have you that it has any

value?" But when they see in any life the print of the nails, they are

challenged, and like Thomas of old, if they can be made to see Him at

that moment, they will fall down and cry, "My Lord and my God!"

The valedictory messages had to be written out, checked for doctrine and grammar, and memorized by the speakers. I felt hampered

reciting a memorized text. But I fell in line, as I had tried to do

throughout my school days.

Beloved of the Lord

On the day of graduation, I went forward and faced that big audience. I did not feel as nervous as I expected to, and started in

easily, but as I proceeded, I felt the message was not going into the hearts of the audience.

In my anxiety to give it the meaning it had for me, I forgot how the next paragraph started. It was for only a second, but to me it was a catastrophe.

I got through the message, went to my seat, hung my head, and waited until the end of the program when I would be free to dash for my room. Once up there, I fell on my knees in an agony of humiliation and failure.

Suddenly the Lord was there in the room. I felt His love folding me around. "Never mind, dear," He was saying. "Failure or success, it is all over now, and My love is just the same."

"The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders" (Deut. 33:12).

The words came to me as if spoken, and the tenderness that engulfed me was as the balm of Gilead to my agonized soul. Slowly I relaxed, rested on Him and drank deeply of His love. It was a wonderful experience, and I was lifted up in spirit so that I no longer cared about any personal humiliation. I have never forgotten the outpouring of God's love upon me that day when I felt such a failure.

A Humble Start

After graduation came candidature at the China Inland Mission (CIM) in Toronto. I was there for some three or four weeks before being called to meet the Council.

That is a formidable occasion and I was nervous, as I am not quick at thinking on my feet. I always do better with preparation and time to consider the best answer. The meeting came and went, and that evening after supper I was called into the sitting room of the Rev. Brownlee, director of the Toronto Mission Home, to hear the verdict.

He said something like this: "The Council was quite satisfied with your answers today, and we in the Home have enjoyed your presence. But the Council asked me to speak to you upon a very serious matter.

"Among your referees there was one who did not recommend you. The reason given was that you are proud, disobedient and likely to be a troublemaker. This person has known you for some years, and the Council felt they could not ignore the criticism."

"Who was it?" I asked, dumbfounded.

"The CIM does not betray the confidence of referees. We write to those who have had business associations with you as well as the referees you yourself give—and we promise to keep all reports in confidence. I cannot tell you the name, but I would like to discuss with

you what havoc such characteristics can cause on the field.”

At the end of an hour of earnest exhortation, he pronounced the verdict: “The Council decided to accept you conditionally. There is an anti-foreign uprising in China just now, which is very serious, and we dare not send out any new candidates. That will be our public statement on this matter.

“During your waiting period, the Vancouver Council will be watching to see if any of these characteristics show themselves. If you prove that you have conquered them, you will then be accepted fully, and sent out with the first party that goes.”

His face was sad. I felt sorry for him, even with the misery that was numbing my own heart. This was the third time the adjective “proud” had been attached to me.

Months before a close family friend had read me an anxious lecture on the subject, to my extreme surprise, for pride was one of the human frailties of which I felt I was not guilty. I had brushed this aside.

China was later to be a painful revelation to me of my own heart and frailty. I now know that he had indeed sensed a real flaw in my life but had hold of the wrong label. I was selfish.

My Heart Revealed

I had whimsically divided the world into two classes—people who interested me and people who did not. I felt I was

not proud, because the people who interested me were often among the poor or the uneducated.

Toward people who did not interest me I must have appeared proud. I brushed them off as time-wasters. This was of course a serious flaw for a missionary, but I fancy its basis was selfishness rather than pride.

The next point was disobedience. How I did get indignant! There were many rules at Moody Bible Institute that were difficult to keep. I had been meticulous in obeying because I had signed a promise to do so.

I had been told not to spread around this second condition of my acceptance by the Mission, but I did write a few friends. They wrote back quickly, indignant and sympathetic. All except Roy Bancroft, a music student with a beautiful baritone voice and a consecrated heart.

I happened to be writing to him those days, and impulsively told him. A letter came back quickly, and I opened it, thinking that Roy too would be indignant on my behalf. But I got a shock.

"Isobel," he wrote, "what surprised me most of all was your attitude in this matter. You sound bitter and resentful. Why, if anyone had said to me, 'Roy B., you are proud, disobedient and a

troublemaker,' I would answer: 'Amen, brother! And even then you haven't said the half of it!' What good thing is there in any of us, anyway? We have victory over these things only as we bring them one by one to the cross and ask our Lord to crucify [them] for us."

Faithful friend he was, not afraid to season his words with salt, even as he did not forget to speak with grace also. I was on my knees in no time asking the Lord to forgive me.

I arose with a different attitude. Instead of resentment there was alertness to watch and see if pride, disobedience and rebellion were really lurking in my camp.

This brought me into peace, even though I always shrank from the memory that I was to be watched for their appearance in my life. I learned of my detractor's identity, and I knew the reason for her hostility. She was a teacher in a school that I had attended, who wanted me to assist her in spying on my fellow pupils. I had incurred her displeasure by refusing.

I was tempted to clear myself with the Council. But I seemed to hear a voice say, "If that had been said of me, I'd have answered: 'Amen, Brother! And then you haven't told the half of it!'"

"No, Lord!" I whispered. "I won't bother the Mission with it. But how princely of You to let me know—it is like a miracle. Only

You could have done it.”

Wounds That Heal

“For the Lord is always kind; be not blind,” wrote Amy Carmichael. Kind? To let me end up at Moody under such a cloud? Kind? To let me begin with the CIM under such a stigma?

Yes. You see, the Lord foreknew there was a work to be done in me before I sailed for China, and if I had ended Institute life with great acclaim I would have wrecked that work at the very outset. My self-confidence needed to be thoroughly jarred before He dare put this delicate affair into my hands. And He jarred it all right.

My Master is thorough, but He had also been meticulously kind—just as soon as He dared, He showed me why. And that experience of His enfolding love after my graduation ceremony has blessed me all my life.

Only by searching can we find out what He is. When the door opened for China again, I received a letter from a member of the Council, granting me unconditional acceptance by the China Inland Mission, and sending me off with their “loving prayers and blessings.”

I bowed my head over that little letter and wept tears of gratitude. Yes, my Master is thorough. He wounds, but He binds up, and His balm of Gilead heals without stinging. It cools, refreshes and restores in every part. He gives the garment of praise for the

spirit of
heaviness and brings beauty out of our ashes.

Isobel Selina Miller Kuhn (1901-1957) was born in Toronto, Ontario. Although she had been raised in a Christian home, she had not always been willing to follow the call of God on her life.

During her time spent at a secular university, Isobel put her faith on hold. A broken engagement pushed her close to the point of suicide one night, but instead, she offered her life to God.

After reading about Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission (now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship), she felt a call to China and, specifically, to the Lisu people—a people group who live mostly in China, Thailand and Burma.

Following a short stint as a schoolteacher and preparation at Moody Bible Institute, Isobel sailed for China in 1928. There she married John Kuhn whom she had first met at Moody.

The Kuhns finally reached Lisuland in 1934. They established Bible schools and helped many of the native peoples to mature in their faith and take on the evangelization of their communities. Isobel's health was fragile at this point, but she lived among the people she loved for 22 years—first in China and later in Thailand.

Isobel wrote several books on her life and experiences. She spent her last years in the United States.

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