

## A Call to Service

BY H. H.

"HELEN, dear, are you prepared for a piece of serious news?"

Two blue eyes looked up questioningly from a summer Missionary Conference folder which had been under discussion in a pair of thoughtful brown ones; but for a few moments no answer was vouchsafed.

Then, in a half-serious, half-bantering tone the girl addressed replied: "You are not going to say, Harold, that some unforeseen circumstance has made it necessary for you to change your plans and that you will not be able to come to Knowlton. That would be serious news, indeed."

"Would you be very much disappointed at not going?" asked the young man, quietly.

"Surely, Harold, you have no need to ask," was the earnest reply. "You know that we have looked forward to that time of help and inspiration for next season's work. And" and there was a softening in the voice as she looked up half-shyly, "don't you think Knowlton has attractions for its own sake and for what its past associations must always mean to us?"

"Yes, dear, I need not have asked that question," he replied, "but to return to the news I have for you. I think it is of far greater importance than even our going to Knowlton—though it is largely due to the inspiration that has come from our associations there that I have it to tell."

"I have received a call to the mission field," he continued after a slight pause, and then hesitated as if uncertain how to proceed.

"To the mission field," slowly repeated the girl, seemingly not certain that she had heard aright.

"Yes, to the mission field; to the work on behalf of which you and I have spent so many happy hours in trying to awaken and increase the interest of those about us."

"But, Harold, do you mean that there is a real possibility of your going?" and a troubled expression crossed the fair face as she looked up at the young man beside her.

"Yes, I feel it is the call of the Master. Do you not think it is the noblest work a man can enter into?"

"I suppose it is," was the trembling, hesitating answer. Then a little more steadily she asked, "When do you expect you will have to go?"

"In a few weeks at most. The post has been made vacant through the sudden illness of the missionary charge, and the work will suffer unless the vacancy is filled at once."

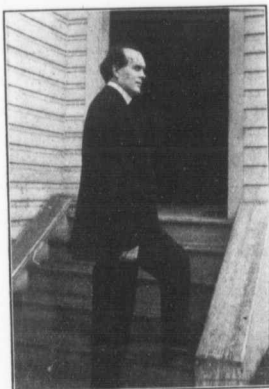
There was silence for a few moments. Then, looking up bravely, she said, in a quiet, even voice, "Harold, it will be hard for your friends here to lose you, but it would be wrong for me to say or do anything that might influence you against doing that which you feel called to do. But—" and there was a catch in the voice and a lowering of the eyes, "would it not have been better to have hinted at such a possibility earlier in our friendship? Was it right that you should win my consent to an engagement which would have to be broken should such an opportunity which has just come to you present itself?"

A look of pain passed over the young man's face, and his voice was deep with emotion as he replied, "Helen, how can you say such things? Do you think that if such a possibility had entered my mind before you had pledged yourself to me that I should not have spoken of it?" Then, more calmly, he continued, "In considering this call it did not enter my thoughts that it need

necessarily change our plans to any great extent, except that our work would be in a different field to that which we have been looking forward to. Your deep interest in this cause, and the active part that you have taken in its advancement amongst those around you left no doubt in my mind that you, too, would consider this as a call to higher service. Why should this separate us? Could we not work together at the front—in the ranks of the noble men and women who have so bravely left all for His sake—as we would have tried to do here at home?"

"Harold, you know I have given up a great deal for the sake of the work; but to leave father, mother, friends, home comforts and the work I love so well, to go amongst a people little better than savages—No, the sacrifice is too great, Harold! Such exile, even with you, would be unbearable."

This is perhaps a little sudden, dear," gently said the young man. "I know the sacrifice is great. I would not ask you to even think of taking such a step were it not that it is for Him who thought it nothing to lay



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down His life for our sake. Helen, you know that I love you too sincerely to let any worldly or personal consideration that might even suggest the possibility of our being separated—weigh with me in the choice of my life work. But in this I feel that your happiness, as well as my own, depends on answering the call. Should I refuse to go, even though in going I should risk losing that which I was looking forward to as the crowning joy of my earthly happiness, I know we should never again have the same blessing, peace and happiness in the Master's work. Would not the thought continually be with us, that when the opportunity had come to show our sincerity we had failed Him? And, Helen," he softly continued with a note of tenderness in his voice as he bent toward the downcast head, "even though the difficulties will be great and the discomforts many, would not our love count for something in overcoming them? Will you not delay your final decision, at least until you have had time to think it over?"

A painful silence of several minutes ensued—a silence in which love, duty and self struggled for the mastery. Ah,

how many of us are willing to toll and work for a cause in which we believe with all our heart as long as we may do so where surroundings are congenial, but when the call comes demanding self-sacrifice, then is the test of our sincerity, and we often find it is not as deep as we had thought.

The answer came slowly and with perhaps a slight tremor of the voice, but its decisiveness could not be mistaken. "No, Harold, it would be my mind now to delay my decision. My mind is fully made up. If you feel that you must take this step it is best that you understand now that I cannot go with you or follow you; and to consider the matter further would only be painful to both of us. It is therefore best that this be our final parting. Glad, indeed, will I be to hear of your work, but it is wisest that we do not meet again. It may tend to weaken your resolve and I cannot help to change mine," and the fair head lowered to hide the threatening tears and trembling lip.

"Helen, listen to me," earnestly exclaimed the young man, as he grasped her hand and tried to look into the averted face. "Do not let a hasty decision spoil the happiness of your lives. Do not bid me not to see you again, but let us pray over it and ask for guidance of Him who has given the call. Perhaps to-morrow or in two or three days you will have been able to see more clearly."

"Don't, Harold, you know it almost breaks my heart that we should be parted. But your pleading cannot alter my decision. Believe me, it is best that you take this as my final answer."

For a minute or two Harold stood looking down at the bowed head of the girl who had been so much to him in the past months. At last, realizing that further discussion at that time could be nothing but painful to her, he quietly said: "I can fully understand that a sacrifice it would have been to you, and perhaps there was a touch of selfishness on my part to think of it. If this is your final decision no doubt it is best that I should not trouble you again; but if you should change your views, and God grant that you may, you know gladly I will come at your call. I have every confidence in the goodness and power of the Master, whom I had hoped one day we would unite to serve in whatever field He saw fit, to believe that if it is best for His work and our future happiness that we should be brought together, He will accomplish it in His own good time. Good-bye, Helen, God bless you, and may we both be led to do that which He willeth us to do," and, with a last tender look turned, he picked up his hat and slowly passed out into the night.

Harold Copland and Helen Ewing, two years before, had met for the first time at a missionary conference at Knowlton, widely known for its beauty of situation and now fast becoming to be looked upon as the future Canadian "Northfield"—the centre for the training of religious and temperance workers in Eastern Canada. Both were deeply interested in the cause of missions, and this bond of common interest had drawn them into intimate discussion. He, as it applied to his future work in the ministry, for which he was then studying, and she, as it affected her work in the Young People's Missionary Society, of which she was the leading spirit.

The friendship thus begun and renewed on their return to the city, ripened into a strong attachment, which, several months before the opening of our story, ended in an engagement, subject to the young man's appointment. A few weeks previous he had passed his final examinations with honors, and the prospects of an early