

MISSION FIELD.

My Friends the Missionaries.

(From the Home of the Bible.)

BY MARIO LARLAND.

My opposite neighbor at table upon the voyage from New York to Southampton in the autumn of 1893 was a young woman about twenty-five years of age, whom I silently decided by the closing of the second day out, to be among the most interesting of my fellow-passengers. In feature she was pleasing, even pretty, but her charm lay in a certain refinement of speech and manner, combined with quick intelligence and sensibility of expression. She was a lady in grain, and in education and conversation, so far above the average of her sex, that when the crucial twenty-four hours of "slight unpleasantness" to both of us were happily over, I made opportunity to cultivate our acquaintanceship.

We were already good friends when on the fourth night of our voyage—which chanced to be Sunday night—we were pacing the moonlighted deck together, and the talk took a personal turn. The initiative step was my statement that I was bound for Palestine, the Promised Land of my life-long dreams, never before visited by me in body and in truth. My companion listened, and when I proposed jestingly that she should join me in Jerusalem, smiled brightly.

"In other circumstances, nothing would give me more pleasure, but I too, am going to a Promised Land. My destination is Rangoon."

"Are you going alone?" "Alone so far as human companionship is concerned. The friends with whom I was to have sailed left America a week ago, I was detained by a short but severe illness."

This was the preface to the story I drew from her. From childhood she had known that she was "appointed" as she phrased it, to the Master's service in foreign lands. With the natural shrinking of youth from privation and toil, she had tried to get away from the conviction in various ways. At twenty-three she was impelled to reveal to her mother the struggle going on between conscience and expediency, and how she could not escape from the persuasion that the Divine will urged her to consecrate herself to the life of a foreign missionary. The mother's reply set the seal upon her purpose.

"Were I fifteen years younger I would go with you. As it is, let me fulfill my part of the mission by giving you up cheerfully."

From that moment, the deep peace that entered the daughter's soul had never known a cloud, a clear-headed, resolute woman, she knew what she had undertaken. In putting her hand to the plough she had grasped it, not hastily, but with staying power in the hold. In our long and earnest talks upon the subject, I appreciated for the first time what constitutes "a call to the mission field." Since then I have thought and spoken of it with reverence, as something with which a stranger to such depths of spiritual conflict and such heights of spiritual enlightenment as hers may not intermeddle.

My last glimpse of her was at the Waterloo Station, London. We had said "good-bye," she caught sight of me, stepped to the open door of my carriage, the electric light showed the ineffable white peace of the smile with which she kissed her hand to me silently, and made a slight but eloquent upward motion. Then the crowd and the London night swallowed her up, and I saw her face no more.

The thought of her had much to do with the resolution that moved me a month later to seek an interview with a party of missionaries, who, I heard, were voyaging with me upon a P. and O. steamship bound to India via Port Said. The information came to me through the lips of one of the ship's officers who was my vis-a-vis at table. "A jolly game of cards had been disturbed the night before by the psalm singing of a pack of missionaries in the second cabin" he growled, "if they had sung something jolly don't you know, the card party would not have minded it so much although there was such a lot of them that they make a beastly racket, but hymn tunes have a way of making a fellow low in his mind, don't you know?"

I had never heard until then of missionaries as second cabin voyagers, and the impression was disagreeable. It is still, although I have learned how common it is for the Board at home (moved presumably by the churches at home) to economize in this way, especially when the voyage is long. My readers may not sympathize with the indignation that flashed up to my forehead at the coupling of the word "missionaries" and "second cabin." It may be that the failure to fall in with my temper arose from ignorance of the conditions of a six weeks voyage second-class, in a P. and O. steamship. The first cabin passage was inconvenient to discomfort to one used to Atlantic floating palaces. The linen was dingy and musty; the food badly cooked and carelessly served; the general debility of the milk and the sustained strength of the

butter were matters of popular complaint, nothing was up to the prime standard of quality except prices. As soon as breakfast was over I betook myself to the end of the ship where was located the second-cabin, and passing through the gate, asked a ruddy young Englishman if I might have speech with my friends the missionaries. He was one of them he said pleasantly, and he had the whole band about me in a few minutes, sixteen of them, all from Great Britain, four Wesleyans, four Baptists, four from the Church of England, and four Congregationalists. My exclamation at the equal allotment of each denomination raised a laugh, and we were no longer strangers. In breeding and education the women were the superiors of those who lounged in sea chairs under the double awning amidships, and murmured languidly at the heat and length of the voyage.

The cheerful contentment of the party was to me astonishing. With one accord they overlooked discomforts until they became glaringly obtrusive, then laughed at them. When questioned, all pitched the stories of personal experience in one key. Of their own free will, and after mature deliberation, they had entered upon a course they hoped to continue while life should last, and they rejoiced and were glad in it. Six of the sixteen were veterans in the foreign field; five were the children of missionaries who had been educated in England and were going to carry on the work begun by their parents.

The peace that passed worldly understanding was not the serenity of ignorance. They knew what they were undertaking.

A young man—a first-cabin passenger—who had heard with mingled wonder and cynicism the report of my visits to the "psalm singers" one day asked to accompany me. Being a gentle man he quickly affiliated with the missionaries and made the most of our call. It was evening, and after bidding them "good night" we waited the deck for a while, he glancing at each turn, at the group seated in the moonlight within the cabin doors. By and by he gave without prelude his solution of the mystery of the happiness of such people in such circumstances. "They must love Him" reverently raising his cap "very much."

In six words he had furnished the key to conduct that battles the adepts in secular policy. It is a key that adjusts itself to every combination.

Through the silence succeeding the unexpected remark I seemed to hear in the rush of the south wind that blew softly and the wash of the Mediterranean waves, like the rhythm of a Gregorian chant:—"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In Beirut, Syria, I counted my friends the missionaries by the score. Dr. Post, the head of the medical department of the Protestant College, which is, to all intents and purposes, a university, was our fellow passenger from Port Said, via Jaffa, and the first hand clasp I had after we anchored in the Beirut offing, was from Dr. Bliss, the President. For ten days and more I was in hourly association with the noble body of professors and tutors, who, with their families make up one of the most charming social circles it was ever my privilege to enter. During one of the calls with which Dr. Bliss honored me, he said with the air of a man who celebrates a happy anniversary.—"Thirty seven years ago I left my native land for this place and work." "Have you never regretted it?" "Regretted it! In looking back to day, my regret is that I have not in the course of nature, thirty seven years more to devote to the same cause."

"We are sometimes spoken of as the gilt edged mission," he continued, but there are black edges to certain leaves of our history."

This introduced a deeply interesting abstract of the early struggles of the mission band—then a feeble folk—against half-hearted backers at home, and the apathy of the native population. I had from an eye witness the particulars of the Massacre of Christians by the Druses in 1802. How every native Christian man and boy in the settlements near Beirut was killed, and the women and girls were brought down from the ruins of their homes to fill the mission house and be fed, nursed, and clothed by the missionaries and their wives. Of an alarm of peril that led to the flight by night under cover of the cactus hedges lining a lane that ran down to the pier, where lay a boat ready to convey the hunted American Christians to an English man-of-war. Babies were snatched from their beds, and borne off by their parents, everything else of value being left for the pillagers. Of Mrs. Bliss's sigh, as she sped along in the midnight at her husband's side, "If we could only escape to the mountains!" and his reply, "God is our refuge and strength, my dear. Look at the mountains, the Lebanon range, that at sunset had been as the Garden of the Lord in terraced luxuriance of vine and olive and fig tree, now