

Material specific to Mary C. Murray

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Pamphlet

Visiting in the Various Hospitals

MISS MARY MURRAY, VISITOR TO THE TORONTO HOSPITALS

Miss Mary Murray, W.M.S. Hospital visitor in Toronto, has for eighteen years given herself unsparingly to this work. She has brought messages of comfort to the sick, written to their friends, followed up discharged patients, gathered lonely girls about her in her room and sought to link them with some women's club or Bible class. Her work has taken her into the Detention Homes, the Mercer Reformatory and seven Hospitals, and everywhere she goes her sympathetic interest and counsel is eagerly sought. Previous to entering the service of our W.M.S., Miss Murray was in Africa with Mary Slessor.

It is one of the highest privileges to be allowed to carry the Word of Life, from the God of all comfort, to the suffering ones. Affliction is not joyous but grievous, nevertheless it worketh the peaceable fruits of righteousness, to them who are exercised thereby.

This work brings you into touch with varied needs, cares, anxieties, with suffering borne long before the patient came into the hospital, and fear as to what will be the outcome.

You meet a mother of a large family who has suffered a general break down in the battle to make ends meet. She has had no time to read. The Word of comfort and peace is given to her and it takes a grip. Your visitor sits silently beside her while she unburdens her heart. She has no Church connection, but her children attend a Sunday School near their home. Leaving her a Testament, you pass on to another. She is calling out for her mother, and is still a little under the anæsthetic. I tell her her mother is coming to see her if she has a sleep. "We'll ask Jesus to put you to sleep." She went to sleep and wakened to find her mother at her bedside. She will never forget that answer to prayer.

Another young woman came out to Canada with such hope that she was going to do well. She had an accident, which caused partial paralysis. Now her whole life has to be adjusted. The seed of comfort was sown in her heart and brought forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness. How she enjoyed and fed on the Word of God! Her confession was that it was worth while to have her hopes blighted to know the Lord Himself.

Another young woman, who is gradually slipping away, wants the Psalms read and re-read to her. They bring her such comfort. She gives you the keys of her trunk and asks that you see her laid away and write to her brother that she was cared for by Christian friends. This was done. The trunk with her belongings was sent to Scotland with a picture taken at the grave with a few friends standing by. The letter of appreciation that came from her brother made the service worth while.

Old and homeless women often come into hospital. They have no friends and have got out of touch with the Church and there is nothing but regret for them as they look back over their lives. To them also is given the comfort that comes through prayer and the message of the Word. It is like a drink of water in a dry land when you meet one who has many Church friends, her minister visiting her, friends calling on her and bringing her flowers.

Then there are the many suffering ones, waiting to be taken to the Hospital for Incurables. I follow them up there. Some of the patients

in that hospital I have known for eighteen years. And what an uplift they are to one's own heart as they wait for the liberation of their poor, deformed, pain ridden bodies! A few ask "Why?" and I point them to the love that bought us, and to the promise "all things work together for good to them that love God."

Let me take you to the maternity ward. I have the names of twelve Presbyterians. Nine of these have husbands out of work. Some are finding the burden very heavy and I try to lighten it by sympathy from the Church, through the women of the Church, and the beautiful supplies—such wonderful baby outfits, so beautiful in pink or blue, with three of each garment, powder, soap, face cloth, safety pins and a comforter—with nighties and quilts for the mother—all the gifts of our generous women. Can you picture what it means to these mothers, lying wondering where they were to get clothes for their baby, when I appear with a baby outfit. Anxiety is replaced by joy and peace and gratitude to our Father, for everything is a gift from His hand.

Then there is the little mother who should not be a mother, lacking the comfort of a husband, in hiding for months from her friends. She, too, unburdens her heart as baby clothes are presented. You leave her at the crossroads and, before you leave, her hand is in yours as she promises to trust and not be afraid.

Opportunity to see the narrow and the broad road are given to those who find themselves in the Reformatory. The "Gideon Band" places a Bible in every room, and silently the seed is sown. The questions asked your visitor indicate that the Living Word is permeating. This seed sowing is followed by helpful meetings and talks by the different denominations. Representing our Society I work with all social service workers in the different hospitals, and we help each other. I also appreciate the assistance of the doctors, officials, nurses, ministers, deaconesses and all those women who are supporting this work with their prayers.

Hospital visiting is a very great privilege. It is a ministry to those who are "shut in." It may include a letter to mail; a phone message to a mother or deaconess, Bible class teacher or friend; supplying their need from a store; taking the opportunity to enquire whether they have a Testament or gospel, and getting them to promise they will read at least a verse a day. These Testaments and gospels are a gift from the British and Foreign Bible Society and have proved a blessing to many.

A young woman was brought into the hospital. She had been taken ill on the street. I offered her a Testament. "Oh, I have mother's at home and I would not part with it. You know mother died in Grace Hospital and this Testament was in her parcel with her clothes, and father and I read a chapter together every night." I said yes I gave your mother the Testament. She was greatly comforted to know that I had met her mother.

A monk said to a young man, "I preach to-day between 10 and 12 o'clock, you will accompany me." They walked through streets, lanes and byways, speaking a little here and there. On nearing home the young companion said, "When do you preach?" The monk's reply, "I have preached as we walked."

THE WOMEN'S MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

Room 700, Sterling Tower

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Mary Murray

In Africa with Mary Slessor
In Scotland in City Mission Work
In Canada as Hospital Visitor

by
MARGARET NESS

*"I can do all things through Christ
who strengtheneth me."*

THIS IS THE TEXT which still upholds Miss Mary Murray after thirty-four years spent in the Master's service.

The woollen mills of Galashiels, a missionary Training School in Glasgow, a year in Africa with Mary Slessor, congregational work in the slums of Edinburgh and of Aberdeen, hospital visiting in Toronto, Canada—what journeyings for this little grey-eyed woman with a soft Scottish voice!

The Edinburgh where John Knox and the Covenanters are still remembered was Mary Murray's birthplace; there she lived with her mother and father and sisters and brother until her eighth year when the mother faced the world alone and decided to move the family to Galashiels. There the woollen mills offered work—work in the home at which the children could help after school hours. It took a brave heart to face the future—six children to feed and clothe and educate. But Mrs. Murray neither faltered nor accepted outside help. And as the children grew up and passed the required standard in school, they obtained part-time work in the mill. Little curly headed eleven year old Mary sat on a bench under the warp of the loom, giving the threads to the weaver which he connected to the loom to prepare it for the weaving. Up and down the loom they went, little Mary

underneath, handing up thread after thread for three hours for three-pence.

But there was a yearly treat that the mother managed—a day in Edinburgh. Up by train they went the thirty-two miles. And always they went straight to the Castle where Mons Meg and the crown jewels were viewed. Then they stood in the courtyard and looked down over Edinburgh, and everything was pointed out afresh. At noon they went to John Knox's house where they lunched in the restaurant that occupied the ground floor. Next came St. Giles where Jenny Geddes threw the stool at the minister. And at Greyfriars they stood beside the Martyrs' stone. It was a Covenanters' background that Mrs. Murray was implanting in her children—a background that influenced them all their lives.

THEIR DAILY LIFE, too, was linked with the Church of their fathers. Never in all those years of hard work was Mrs. Murray too tired to see that the children, neat and clean, went twice a Sunday to Public Worship and to Sabbath School. And every Sunday the family learned eight lines of a Psalm which, at night, were repeated to their mother.

It was a strict home in many ways, with a discipline that built up spiritual and physical resistance. There were tasks to be performed, a limited

play time, lessons to be prepared, and bed at seven o'clock.

"Mother, we cannot sleep."

"You're resting," would come the unpromising reply.

And above all it was a happy home. The mother sang at her work, the children loved and teased each other. "Now we'll get 'Moll' angry to-night." But they never did. Little Mary was "slow to anger".

It was a short girlhood that Mary had. At fourteen years of age she stopped school and became a weaver. Her older sisters and brother were already in the mill, and the younger sisters were soon to be there too. It looked as if Mary's life had settled into a pattern within the confining limits of a mill town.

But in Sabbath School the children had heard the story of Mary Slessor of Africa. Her loneliness and her courage excited Mary Murray's sympathy. And with the hope that, someday, somehow, the call would come to her to share in Mary Slessor's work, she entered Miss Forrester-Payton's Training School for Home and Foreign Missionaries in Glasgow. It was a practical, two year course with Bible work in the mornings and with dispensary instruction at the Grove Street Mission in the afternoons.

During this period of training it was ever Mary Murray's prayer that she might be sent to Africa. And the Lord heard her, for, on applying to the Zenana Mission for overseas work, she was accepted and appointed to Africa. But there was still that other prayer in her heart,—that she be permitted to share in the work undertaken by Mary Slessor. And so she again applied to the Board, asking if this would be possible. Her joy was "exceeding great" when she learned that her request had been favourably considered.

IN FEBRUARY of 1895 she sailed in a freight boat for Duke Town, Old Calabar, West Coast. There, a month later, she was welcomed by the Presbyterian Mission and remained with the Missionaries for two weeks. Then, with a joyful song in her heart at the thought of her destination, up the river sixty miles she went in a little steam yacht. As they neared the wharf, there, awaiting her, stood Mary Slessor and a group of smiling natives. They had come, grown-ups and children, to welcome their new "Ma" and to escort her home to the three quarters of a mile into the bush. Arrived at the house that Mary Slessor herself had built, the two Marys had supper. Outside the natives sat and waited. Time meant nothing to them. Then in the soft African evening Mary Murray became one with them through the worship service. Black figures squatting on the verandah and on the ground of the compound; black faces shining with

spiritual love; deep voices uplifted in song. The glory of that first evening worship service never faded from Mary Murray's mind.

In those days there was no year spent in preparatory language study. Missionaries learned as they worked. Mary Murray was to be Mary Slessor's housekeeper and pupil. But she also had her own contribution to make. Every eventide before service the sick would gather in the compound, and the two Marys would minister to them. With naive simplicity these Africans clung to the belief that the worse tasting the medicine, the better it must be. Thus effective plain salts were often doctored with different flavourings, and the resultant dose was highly regarded.

Mary Slessor's household consisted of Jean, about thirteen years of age, Mena (Mang-a), a little older than Jean, and four little girls just at the creeping stage. Each one of the latter had been a twin, abandoned by their mothers. Jean, too, had been an abandoned twin, the first one rescued by Mary Slessor. When twins were born to a native woman, she had to flee for life away from her tribe. Evil spirits were thought to dwell in her that she should give birth to more than one. Usually some one came and informed Mary Slessor and she would hurry to the scene of birth in the hope that she might save the twins. Sometimes she was successful in saving both, sometimes one. These she would keep with her at her home until

they were old enough to be sent down the river to the Mission School at Duke Town.

But Mary Murray was not to be permitted to remain long in Africa—only a year. Her health broke, and she was advised that she must return home. It was a bitter blow to her—one that is still keenly felt.

ON HER RETURN to Scotland she became the first trained Presbyterian worker in a congregation in Edinburgh, assisting Dr. Drummond of Lothian Road Church and helping in the Mission connected with the Church. It was quite an innovation to have a woman assistant (the word 'deaconess' was not then in use) and the Synod enquired of Dr. Drummond at Assembly how the plan was working out. Dr. Drummond is reported to have replied, "Fine. Miss Murray can hear a story told twice over and no one would ever know it."

The Mission started a club for working men, but about twenty boys began to attend. So dirty and unkempt and such ruffians were they that the men objected to their continued attendance. So Miss Murray started a club and a Sunday Bible Class for these boys who had never known the taste of work. For club rooms they were offered the use of a house rented for the purpose by one of the men of the congregation, his only stipulation being that faces and hands must be washed. Miss Murray still smiles reminiscentially over the condition of the towels. And then one day one of the

boys appeared with a collar. Scornful laughter greeted him, but soon collars were the fashion.

To teach the boys to work, a project, which from the first actually paid for itself, was started. Wood was purchased, and the boys split it for kindling and sold it in bags to fill orders from the congregation. In time the project was dropped, all the boys having obtained outside work. But many of them lined up with the Church and the club continued until the Great War took all the members to the front.

But this club was not Miss Murray's only work. Visiting in the homes occupied a great deal of her time. And since a visit from a woman worker was a departure from the old and accepted ministerial call, some of the people were not quite certain that they wanted her. Once a woman in better circumstances than those around her enquired of Miss Murray, "Do you only visit the poor?" "No," replied Miss Murray, sensing what was troubling the woman, "else I wouldn't be coming here." On another occasion, as Miss Murray was leaving after a visit with a comparative newcomer in the district, she asked, "Have you many friends here?" The woman answered sharply, "Yes. I don't need you." But Miss Murray understood. "All right," she said, "but you'll perhaps leave a little corner for me among your friends." Later when the minister called on this woman, she told him that she had had a visit from Miss Murray and would like to have her come again.

AFTER TEN YEARS OF SERVICE in Edinburgh Miss Murray left to do work in the slums of Aberdeen. She went everywhere. She was not afraid—not of the rowdy public houses into which she went, a trim little figure in her blue bonnet and serge cloak, to bring out "her women", nor of the dark, often evil-smelling rooms called "home" by a whole family, into which she carried, under her cloak safe from the prying eyes of neighbours, food and clothing. And the courage of David defying Goliath was hardly less evident than that of this little worker—Miss Murray is only five feet one and a half inches—separating fighting women, a common sight in the streets of Aberdeen in those days.

There was another side of the picture too—the comfort and security of her room in the Church where "many a pot of soup I made for my folk". My folk! Yes, they were her "folk", and she was, to them, a combination of a good Samaritan and a guardian Angel. Indeed, the chief of police told the minister that Miss Murray was worth twenty policemen in the district. "But, of course, that was an exaggeration," Miss Murray insists.

After three years in Aberdeen Miss Murray decided to take a maternity training course in Edinburgh at Simpson's Memorial Hospital. That completed, she came, with her mother and youngest sister to Canada. The mother and sister were intending to make Canada their home, for the brother John had long since left the wool-mill and had

settled in Canada as a Congregational Minister, but Miss Murray was on a visit of a year only.

That year, however, decided her future. She "felt a pulling towards Canada". On her return home she nursed a cousin for fifteen months but did not try for any permanent work. Then the "pull" became too strong for her, and she sailed again for Canada, coming direct to Toronto to friends. To the Rev. Dr. J. MacP. Scott, then minister of St. John's Presbyterian Church, she handed her testimonials, and he, together with the Rev. Dr. A. S. Grant, laid them before the General Assembly. Later when her appointment as a hospital visitor was under discussion by the Home Mission Board, Dr. Grant pointed out that a woman could win the confidence of women patients in a way that a man could not do, retired ministers having previously carried on this work. So Miss Murray received her appointment—the first recognized woman hospital visitor under any Church in Canada, for it was not until her contacts had revealed the value of such work that the other denominations appointed similar workers.

However, Miss Murray did not remain under the Church for long. Six months later the Council Executive of the Women's Missionary Society was looking for some one to work among the "strangers" in Toronto, and Dr. Grant suggested that Miss Murray might be taken over by them as much of her hospital visiting and "follow-up" work was among these strangers.

Thus Miss MARY MURRAY came under the Women's Missionary Society and came to stay. Twenty-five years have passed since that January day in 1915 when she made her first official hospital visit as a representative of the Women's Missionary Society. (Her appointment was made in 1914, work to commence in January, 1915.) Twenty-five years of service is a long and valiant record, and when added to seventeen years of service in Africa and Scotland, it becomes indeed a "life-work".

At first she visited nine hospitals, but of late years she has had to "cut this down" to seven. Three of these, Mercy, House of Providence and St. Michael's are "next door to each other". The others are scattered over the city,—Hospital for Incurables, Western, General, Women's College. Added to these hospitals is the Mercer Reformatory where there is "sickness of the mind and heart". This is her regular routine, but often some one will write, telling of a member or adherent of their Church who is in one of the other hospitals. In such cases Miss Murray adds the name to her list.

And what does a hospital visitor do? Miss Murray visits her seven hospitals and the Mercer Reformatory regularly. In the hospitals she consults the record for new Presbyterian patients and removals from one ward to another, noting all newcomers who have entered since the last name

on her list. Then, with the permission of the nurses in charge of the wards, she goes from patient to patient, stopping often on the way for a chat with others than those on her Presbyterian list. For some who are very ill she has a word of comfort, for others she has "just a wee prayer", for many she is a trusted confidant and friend, sharing in their interests, their troubles, and often doing outside errands for them. For everyone she has a message, usually a text which she hopes will remain with them and be a source of comfort and strength. Quite often she has a "treat" with her,—little jars of preserves and jams supplied by a Women's Missionary Society group, a few fresh eggs, or knitted things for the new baby through the Supply Department.

Then, too, she works along with the Social Service Department, checking with them about home conditions and needed clothing. Sometimes she is able to help them by passing on suggestions gained in conversation that will make for the patient's present and future comfort.

HERE ARE THREE THINGS in hospital visiting that Miss Murray always keeps in mind—the rules that govern each hospital, the etiquette of the nurses, and the fact that the patients are ill. "That has ever been my guide," Miss Murray says. How wise a "guide" it is has been proved by the friendly attitude of the hospital staffs in those hospitals where she visits. Indeed she was asked by the head

of the Social Service Department of the General Hospital to include the cancer ward in her visiting shortly after the Dunlop Building was opened in 1933.

Miss Murray herself does not do "follow-up" work now. She is not physically able. But when patients who are in need of further help leave the hospital, she communicates with the Presbyterian Welfare and Welfare Secretary, knowing that this Department can, and will, carry out this important work.

Always Miss Murray hopes that, if the patient is not already a member of the Church, a link may be forged that will result in a closer Church connection. If the patient is a young woman, Miss Murray suggests that she attend a Bible Class in one of the city Churches. And many have done so and have, in time, joined the Church.

The Mercer Reformatory was added to Miss Murray's list shortly after her appointment to hospital work, the Reformatory Board having requested that a representative of the Presbyterian Church be appointed to visit the Presbyterian girls. It is quite optional whether or not the girls come to the visitors' room to see Miss Murray but most of them do. For some she is their only visitor in their two years less one day. (The "less one day" prevents their sentence being a penitentiary one.)

"Make the Reformatory a stepping stone to something better" is her advice to these girls. She encourages them to tell about their work in the institution and about their difficulties, but she seldom asks what brought them there. It is the future in which she is interested. "I ask newcomers if they have a Bible in their cubicle and get them to promise to read it every day." And because she feels that these girls need her every bit as much as do the patients in the hospitals, every Saturday afternoon for twenty-four years she has been turning in at the big gates shortly before two o'clock. One Saturday it is the first offenders who come to her; the next, the second offenders. To each and every one she is that rare thing—a true friend.

In May, 1938, the Council Executive arranged a leave of absence for Miss Murray so that she might go "home" and spend the summer with her brother (who had returned to Scotland) and her sisters. No one who has not the love of two countries in her heart can know the same double joy that was Miss Murray's—the joy with which she set out to see her family, renew old acquaintances and revisit old places, and the joy with which she returned in the Fall, refreshed and contented, to her "folk" in the hospitals.

Throughout her life Miss Murray has placed utter reliance on God, a reliance that was learned early in life, for she "went in faith" into her training, not having the money on hand to see her

through her course. "And it was then I learned," she says, "that God would provide for all my temporal needs. Even if I was out of postage stamps and brought that need before Him, a friend would invariably send me some. And so I have ever found it. He meets all my needs."

Thirty-four years of service in Scotland, Africa, Canada! An enviable record.

*Retired in 1940
(see WMS report for
1940)*