

The Free Press Short Story

THE HIGHWAY OF OUR LORD

GEORGE ETHELBERT WALSH

OUR duty is first to our own country and people, Kurt. Alton Reynolds repeated with emphasis. "So long as good doctors are needed at home, I can't see why a promising young man like you should waste his talents in China."

Kurt Westfield smiled. "Would you call them wasted," he asked, "helping the sick anywhere should be a noble work, whether they're heathen Chinamen or Americans."

"I shouldn't have said that," amended Alton quickly. "Of course a doctor's work is never wasted in any field. But your use of the word heathen reminds me of something. You'd be working among the heathen or at least unbelievers in Rockdale. They need you as a Christian leader as well as a doctor. You could do splendid work there, Kurt, and set an example to bootleggers, law-breakers, and undisciplined aliens. It's the opportunity of a lifetime."

Kurt Westfield was impressed, and tempted as never before. Alton Reynolds, his friend, and president of the Rockdale Smelting Company, sensed it, and smiled knowingly. "Think it over," he finished. "Time enough. You had planned to go to China until fall. That will give you several months for a decision."

In his third year at the medical school, Kurt decided to prepare himself as a medical missionary. Long Woo, of China town, in the heart of the metropolis, who as an importer of Chinese products had become wealthy and respected among his people, had taught him the language of the country, and had been instrumental in choosing the mission field for the young man.

When Kurt first announced that he had decided to become a medical missionary in China, Long Woo, a convert to Christianity himself, had embraced him. "You make old Long Woo's heart beat with gladness," he had said. "My poor war-torn country needs American doctors and missionaries. May God be praised!"

Long Woo would have gladly financed Kurt in his studies; but a small income from his dead father made him independent, and he preferred to pay his own way. Long Woo's friendship, however, was worth more than money. The man gave Kurt an insight into Chinese character that was more practical than any course of studies he could have taken.

Kurt's enthusiasm for his chosen career continued. On the eve of his graduation from the medical school, however, Alton Reynolds, an old friend of his father's, came with a flattering offer. Rockdale smelters employed a thousand men, most of them of foreign birth. The company, through its president, offered Kurt a good salary and a house, to look after the health of its workers. A religious man himself, Reynolds wanted to send a company doctor to Rockdale whose Christian influence would be felt for his chosen work.

Kurt shook his head and turned down the offer; but the persistence that had made Alton Reynolds president of a rich and powerful company was not easily thwarted. He dwelt at great length upon the young man's opportunity to do good. "A doctor there is a big man, my boy," he pleaded. "You'd soon become the leader in the place outside of your professional sphere. Isn't that so, Thelma?" he added, appealing to his daughter.

The girl nodded, but made no comment. Kurt had great respect for her opinion. He had worked by her side in the church during his course in medical school and had found her thoughtful and devoted to helping others. Her beauty was somewhat exceptional, and Kurt was not blind to it. Thelma Reynolds would make a splendid wife for some lucky man, and of late Kurt had been secretly hoping he might be the one.

As the time approached when Kurt had to make a final decision, he appealed to Thelma. "What should I do, Thelma?" he asked, anxiously. "Shall I go to Rockdale as a medical missionary or to Rockdale, as a sort of medical home missionary?"

"Have you asked for divine guidance, Kurt?" she asked simply.

"Yes, but I get no answer," was the moody reply.

The girl smiled. "Then if the question has to be decided by God can't he answer it, how can you expect me to do it?" she asked demurely.

Kurt was a little abashed by the answer, for it raised in his mind the question of whether or not he had asked earnestly for divine guidance. In a way he had, but he realized suddenly that the pros and cons of the question had been considered chiefly from a selfish point of view. He was eager to go to China, for the great opportunities offered for a physician interested in certain forms of disease and the application of up-to-date methods in checking them. For experimental medical work, China offered the enthusiast the greatest chance in the world.

Rockdale lacked this incentive, but it had other attractions for a physician. He could do an immense amount of good in teaching a better way of living and making their homes more sanitary. Ignorance and prejudice would have to be overcome. To make the work more alluring Thelma Reynolds would be there to applaud his efforts.

"I'll go to Rockdale!" Kurt exclaimed one day. "That's my call. I'm sure now that I can do better work there than in China."

Having vacillated for so long, he was eager to settle the question beyond recall. Long Woo was the first to be informed, he decided and then the missionary board, who had his name down tentatively as a medical missionary to go out in the fall. After that he would tell Thelma and her father, who would be pleased by his decision.

Long Woo was the first to be informed. After stating his decision, Kurt waited for the old Chinaman's reactions. Long Woo was quiet a moment, his disappointment showing in his face. "If God wills it, you will go to China," he said finally, in Christian resignation. "I shall not urge you, my son to change your mind, but I shall pray."

The old Chinaman's simple faith made Kurt a little ashamed of his own. He had not looked at the matter in this way. His decision had been based upon logic, he told himself. Both calls had been carefully weighed. He could accomplish good in either field, and if one offered him greater chances for happiness, why was he not justified in choosing that?

He would not change his mind again. He would accept the call to Rockdale, and throw his whole heart and soul in the work. There would be others to go to China, perhaps better men than himself. The medical missionary work there would not suffer materially because one person dropped out.

Kurt was eager to see Thelma to inform her of his decision. If, as he suspected, she returned some of his love for her, she would be glad that he had chosen Rockdale as his field of work, instead of China. Great as was his desire to inform her, however, he felt that a sense of honor demanded that he should go first to the missionary board to tell them he had withdrawn from the China field. They would be disappointed, but after all it was an impersonal matter with them.

Anticipating no trouble or unpleasantness, Kurt went to missionary headquarters. He found the officers in an informal session, listening to the reports of a returned missionary. Doctor Roberts, who had charge of the selection of missionaries, greeted the young doctor with a warm handclasp. "Come inside, Kurt," he said. "Doctor Pilson, one of our oldest missionaries in China, is here giving us some first-hand information from his field. You'll enjoy listening to him."

Kurt acquiesced with a nod, and took a seat. Doctor Pilson he knew by name and reputation. He was a tall, grumpy, white-haired man of sixty, but his eyes were those of an enthusiast. Kurt came under his spell after a few minutes of talk, and when the man explained briefly the conditions existing in China he followed him closely. War-torn China was in a dreadful state. Plague, disease, and suffering followed the warring chiefs.

"China is going through terrible times," the elderly missionary concluded. "Old ways and standards are being swept aside. Faiths are being shattered. But out of all the welter and seemingly uncalculated-for chaos, a new spiritual life is dawning. What will take the place of the present confusion?"

He paused a second, and then proceeded even more solemnly: "If asked what is China's greatest need to-day, I would unhesitatingly say, medical missionaries. Disease is rampant. The number of doctors in China is woefully inadequate. Following every revolution there are wounded and sick to be cared for. Many of them have no medical aid at all, and they die like flies. If I could only get this message over to the young doctors, you are turning out of your medical schools, I believe many would volunteer. You have a surplus of doctors in this country. Why not send a few of them to China? My prayer is and shall be, 'O God please send us medical missionaries!'"

Kurt sat as though stupefied, his whole soul aroused by the impassioned plea. He felt that the finger of God was pointing to him. It suddenly came to him that he had faltered and wavered because of personal ease and ambition. God had now spoken and he must accept the call.

He called at the Reynolds home that evening and gave his decision. Alton Reynolds was disappointed but he was fair, a Christian man at heart. "I won't say I'm not disappointed," he said. "I am! But in a sense I'm pleased. You have made the right decision, if you feel as you say. May God help you!"

Kurt turned to Thelma, and said, with a whimsical smile on his lips, "Won't you congratulate me, Thelma, or—"

"Yes, Kurt," she replied. "I do congratulate you! I've wanted you to go to China all along."

"But we won't see each other often," she replied.

She interrupted him with a light laugh, her eyes twinkling. "Often than you think, Kurt," she said. "I'm going to China, too in the fall."

"You—to China?" he gasped. "Oh, you mean on a visit?"

"No, permanently, as a missionary. I, too, have felt the call, and have been studying and preparing myself."

Kurt was so amazed that he could only stare in dumbfounded surprise. "We said about the same time, don't we?" she added, smiling. "It's on the sixth of October I go."

"Why, that's the date I sail!"

"On the 'Messaba.' Is that your steamer?"

"Of course it is! You've known that all along! Oh, Thelma, if—I dared hope!"

"Look here!" interrupted Mr. Reynolds. "If you young people have any secrets to exchange, I'll get out of it. It looks as if I was going to lose both of you. The only way for me to see you in the future is to go to China and establish a medical mission. I'll endow it, and name it—"

He glanced from one to the other, his eyes twinkling. "I'll name it the Westfield-Reynolds mission."

Kurt was too confused to answer, and Thelma merely nodded and flushed prettily.

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DID HE GET WELL?

"Where have you been for the last four years?"
"At college, taking medicine."
"And did you finally get well?"

WOULDN'T STAND IT

Your four-year-old Joe had just come in from his playmate, a girl about a year older. He troubled features showed he had a serious problem on his mind, and he volunteered the explanation of the situation.
"I don't want to get in the habit," he said, "of Ruth Spencer hitting me."

SOME DANCER!

"Why don't you like dancing with George?"
"Oh, George is all right; but he won't let his right foot know what his left one is doing!"

SOME FOOTFAD!

Victim: "But my watch isn't a good one. Its value is only sentimental."
Poopaid: "That doesn't matter, guv'nor. I'm sentimental."

YOU ANSWER

"Daddy!" exclaimed the little boy.
"One more question, then," alighted the tired father. "Only one."
"How far is it," inquired the tot, "between 'to' and 'fro'?"

A HOSKY!

"Well, Johnny," said the uncle who hadn't seen him for some time "you are getting to be quite a big boy now, aren't you?"
"Yep," replied the kid, "pop says I'm growing like the public debt."

GOOD ADVICE

"How shall I mend this run in my stocking?"
"By following the usual rule of success."
"What do you mean?"
"Begin at the bottom of the ladder."

HOW COULD HE KNOW?

Diner: "Walter, this steak tastes just like an old boot smeared with onion."
Walter: "But, sir, what strange meals you have had!"



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