

**COUNSEL TO  
NEW MISSIONARIES**

**From Older Missionaries of the  
Presbyterian Church**



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### *SPECIAL MEDICAL COUNSEL TO WOMEN MISSIONARIES.*

*By Bertha Caldwell, M. D., Formerly of India.*

**Y**OU have applied to the Board of Foreign Missions for service in that portion of God's vineyard, and I, as one who has been "on the field," have been asked to give you a few private suggestions regarding your health and how to fit yourself physically, both before starting and after you have reached your destination. Not all the suggestions, however, that would fill volumes will do any good unless they are coupled with sound common sense, on the part both of the giver and of the receivers, and so, in the few suggestions I am privileged to give you I shall take it for granted that you are richly endowed with a practical mind, and really wish the best equipment in the way of health that it is possible for you to have.

Let me begin, then, with the subject of eyes and ask you whether, when you have been studying at college or teaching or doing any close work, your eyes have given you the least trouble. If so, do not dream of coming to a foreign country without consulting a leading oculist. Your family doctor will not do in this case, though he may be very clever, but it is a specialist you need now. You may be stationed in a country where there is no such person as an oculist, and you know the day for buying glasses in the bazar is over. See to it, then, if you have the slightest doubt of your eyes, or if you are

a sufferer from headaches which cannot be traced to any other cause, that you have them tested. If you find you need glasses, procure two pairs to bring with you, and leave your prescription with the optician in case of accident. The Oriental languages have very fine characters, most trying to the beginner, and you will need to be extremely careful and shut up your books on the first symptom of eye strain. And I wish to say to those who already wear glasses that it will be a wise precaution to have your eyes retested, and wear and get used to your glasses a few weeks before sailing. I have known several sad cases where the young missionaries put off the final test till the last thing before sailing and suffered the penalty for years after in badly fitted glasses.

Regarding your ears, nose and throat, I want to ask you questions that your examining physician may not have deemed necessary, or may not have thought essential in relation to your general health. And so they may not be—in America—but remember, you are probably going to a country where there is not a single specialist in nose, throat and ear diseases, and if you have been, even in the very slightest degree annoyed by these troubles at home, a treacherous tropical climate will lay hold on these weak spots of yours and increase your annoyance tenfold. Are you slightly deaf, or if you have a "cold," do your ears ever "run"? Remember, you will need the very keenest hearing to get the language perfectly. Do you have a slight catarrh in the winter, having to do considerable "hawking" when you rise in the morning? Then allow me to suggest that you consult your doctor and become cured of this annoyance before you start, or the first

rainy season will see you laid up for days, and probably weeks, with a weak throat. Every form of missionary work is dependent on much talking and singing, and if your throat gives out and you become exhausted after the first lesson or the first song, you will be poorly equipped indeed for your work. Cases of this kind in missionaries come under my notice only too frequently.

It seems almost superfluous to mention the teeth, yet some missionaries come out to foreign fields very badly equipped in this particular, because of ignorance of the fact that foreign countries, such as you and I are interested in are not over-stocked with dentists. In India there are a few American dentists scattered at long distances, but even in a sudden emergency it is agony to go a day's travel by rail and several hours by tonga and dandi, in search of some one to relieve the pain. You should have your teeth examined just before you start and lay in a large stock of tooth brushes, which are generally both expensive and inferior in quality outside of England or America.

And now I ask, have you the faintest suspicion of a goitre? You may smile at that and wonder why I ask it, but it is astonishing how common it seems to be in young women, and if I had not seen several young missionaries just out from home suffering with slight goitres, which had to be treated for months by painful methods, I, too, might not have deemed it important enough to mention. India especially is the country for large goitres in women, due to certain drinking waters, and even the smallest goitres increase very rapidly. So let me recommend you to remain out of a tropical country until every trace of it has disappeared.

Tropical countries play havoc with people of sedentary habits in the way of producing most obstinate constipation, and constipation produces a train of symptoms, such as headache and listlessness. Nature seems to have provided for this in the abundance and character of her fruits; exercise, too, in some shape or form is absolutely necessary and ought to be taken with the same regularity as the daily bath. Missionaries overlook the fact that the reason Government officials stand hot climates so well is because they believe in a great deal of exercise after work hours. It is a well demonstrated fact that with a stipulated amount of exercise the bowels will be kept in good order and the pores of the skin well open. If, coupled with exercise, a daily cold bath be indulged in, the body will be in the best possible condition to combat serious illness or sudden epidemics.

And now I am going to overlook any weakness of heart, lungs, liver, spleen or kidneys, knowing that these are points upon which your examining physician will place much stress, and upon which you also will naturally be most particular, and I will speak to you of several things especially pertaining to you as a woman. I want to inquire if you suffer from backache, low down in the spine, which makes you perfectly miserable at times; or when tired, do you have a dragged down feeling for which you cannot account, accompanied by other signs of female weakness? You ought not to come to your appointed place until all this is remedied, and it is wisest to consult a good woman physician on the subject. You may find far more ailing you than you ever dreamed of. You have no more right to be laid up at "certain periods" in the month with

pain and backache while on the field—pain which could have been remedied at home had you been conscientious about it—than you have to take several days from your school or office work in your own country. Your employer would not permit your being absent periodically; neither ought you to expect the Board to allow you such a privilege. It is necessary for missionaries to be all the more conscientious as to their time, though the Board is not a hard taskmaster. There are medical missionaries to help you if anything happens to you on the field, but it is your duty to lighten their burdens all you can by coming to your work as well equipped in body as you are expected to be in mind.

You may be expecting to come out married, or to be married soon after landing, and for you I want to say just a word: The first year on any mission field is a hard one; the process of acclimation, of beginning on years of language study, of settling in a new home, of learning the natures and customs of the people for whose souls' good you have come to work—you will find all these very trying, and if you attempt to assume the responsibilities of motherhood at the same time, you will surely find you must neglect some one important thing that you will regret all your missionary life. One's body goes through a changing process in acclimation. Why, then, put it to a further strain with the changes which come with approaching motherhood? I would not for an instant have you shirk this responsibility for all time, but, in general, I can scarcely think of anything so debilitating to a woman in a tropical country, so trying to her temper, so deadening to her interest in her missionary work, so prone to shorten her period

of usefulness to the mission cause, or to her children themselves, as child bearing at frequent intervals. A sick person does not recover from the slightest illness in a hot country as quickly as in a cold one. It stands to reason, then, that it takes some time for a woman's generative organs to recover tone after such a great change. It has been estimated by those who have been interested in the subject that fully three years ought to elapse between children, both for the good of the mother and the child. You may think that such an arrangement may not be in your power. Careful consideration of the subject with the man you love and who has promised to protect you in every way, and a perfect and prayerful understanding with each other will show you your duty. A woman will neither be able to do the work God has sent her out to do, nor to give the care and attention to the children God will give her, unless she keeps her body in the best tone possible.