

His Banner Over Us Is Love



Miss Alice Sterritt



Miss Helen Sterritt

by Vesta Mullen

"His banner over us is love". These words are the testimony of the Sterritt Sisters as they sit in the cosy living room of Ikaya lami (Zulu for "my home") and look back over their years of service for the Lord.

Born in Grey's Mills, Kings County, New Brunswick, the two youngest children of William and Sarah Jane Sterritt, Helen Maria and Alice Florence have the distinction of pioneering a Reformed Baptist church at home as well as advancing the borders of our foreign mission work in South Africa.

Helen, born March 12, 1883, and Alice, November 5, 1884, early developed the closeness which has characterized their relationship to one another throughout their lives. Their mother, born in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, a gentle lady of more than average education and refined tastes, died at the age of forty-eight from diabetes. At the time of her death, Helen and Alice were only twelve and ten years of age respectively. Their oldest brother's wife assumed the responsibilities of managing the household, but as the other children (there were seven living children in the Sterritt family) married or moved away, Helen and Alice began to care more and more for their father's welfare. Mr. Sterritt, a wiry, clean living farmer and "the fastest skater on the river", provided a comfortable home for his family. The popular acceptance of his farm produce in the Saint John area is ample evidence of his ability to make things grow. And he loved his work! His indifference to spiritual things, however, was a burden which rested especially heavy on Helen's heart. Not until the age of eighty-two, three months before his death and four years after the girls sailed to Africa, did he yield his heart to God. Thus the covenant God made with Helen before she sailed to Africa was fulfilled — her father had been the Isaac which Helen had to offer in sacrifice in order to obey God's will.

Winter snows had their effect on school attendance in Grey's Mills in those days. Except for the one winter spent with their married sister in nearby Kingston, the girls were able to attend school only in the spring and fall months. In spite of this handicap, however, both girls finished the "sixth reader", which is to say that they completed all the education available to them at the school. Alice loved school, her favorite subject being geography. Is it not significant, too, that even as a child, she says she saw herself living in a far-away land? While Helen insists that she was no student, she managed to outdo her sister in mathematics, and neither of them had any difficulty to pass the papers required for their hospital training courses.

Repeated suggestions and pleas on Alice's part that

they become Christians during their teen years were always shrugged off by Helen who insisted that she was going to have a good time, unhampered by the restraints of religion. Many a night, tells Alice, she would try to quiet her bedtime fears by reading a verse from her Bible, but the years passed by without either becoming a Christian. Their time was filled with the usual household chores, and school lessons, as well as skating and snowshoeing, neighbourhood parties, and the bi-weekly Methodist services in the community church. Mr. Sterritt, although not a professing Christian, would not allow his daughters to play cards or attend dances or otherwise participate in recognized worldly indulgences.

Meanwhile, the community of Kingston, only four miles distant from Grey's Mills, was experiencing a religious awakening. Living there was a Secord family who had moved there from New England. Both husband and wife were fine Christians, but Mrs. Secord, who in her youth had felt leadings toward mission work, felt discontented and restless to find so little apparent opportunity for service in the little community. But the Lord answered her frustration thus, "There are people here who need God." She accepted the challenge of these words. She and her husband, with other Christians in the area, began to pray. The Spirit of God began to move in answer to their prayers and revival meetings opened up in the Baptist church. One of the evangelists was a laypreacher from Grand Manan, Mr. Richardson. Under his ministry, many families in the community sought God, both for forgiveness and for heart cleansing, popularly known as "holiness", and among these was the Sterritt's sister, Mary Cosman.

Imagine Alice's delight and almost disbelief at receiving a letter from Helen, whose visit in Kingston had brought her under the impact of these meetings, announcing that she had been saved, and urging her to come quickly and do likewise.

"It was just like going from a feast to a famine", recalls Helen, "when I reluctantly left Kingston to return home, but I felt that Alice, too, must have the opportunity of attending the meetings".

Surprisingly enough, it took Alice a week before she was ready to surrender to the Lord. Somewhat embarrassed, she admits, "I just wasn't ready to hobnob with some of the people who were getting saved, and it wasn't until the night I apologized publicly for my attitude, that the Lord set my heart at rest".

(To Be Continued)

PLOWING STRAIGHT

I remember as a youngster,
When my father said to me,
Looking backward down the furrow,
And then right down at me,
"Always plow as straight a furrow
As it's possible to do;
Men will judge you by your plowing,
When they think of hiring you.
If your furrow row is crooked
And you don't plow deep and true,
They'll know you're not the worker
For the task they want to do."
What a practical philosophy,
I suspect it can't be beat.
Whether work or life or morals,
Let's keep those furrows neat.

R. W. Cooper