

**CLARA A. SWAIN, M.D.,
FIRST MEDICAL
MISSIONARY TO THE
WOMEN OF THE ORIENT**

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Clara A. Swain, M.D., first medical missionary to the women of the Orient by Mrs. Robert Hoskins

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By

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MRS. ROBERT HOSKINS

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Clara A. Swain, M. D.

THE frail little mother of a frail little daughter" did not live long enough to see the fullest answer to her prayer that her youngest born might "grow up to be a good and useful woman," for she passed away before her daughter began her medical career, but the prayer was not forgotten by Him who ever hears the cry of those who call upon Him in faith.

Clara was the youngest of the ten children of John and Clarissa Seavey Swain. She was born in Elmira, N. Y., but when she was two years old her parents returned to their old home in Castile and here she spent her early life.

EARLY LIFE

She was not a strong child, and being the youngest of a large family naturally received much attention, which in after years she concluded was not good for her. She once described herself as a puny little thing who wanted everything she saw and thought she ought to have it. "I had a will of my own,"

she said, "and my mother found it necessary to be very firm with me at times. Once I was very rude to her when she did not give me what I wanted, and I shall never forget how grieved she was, and how lovingly she explained to me the necessity for controlling myself if I would be loved by those around me." She was six years old when this naughtiness occurred. "I promised my mother then," she said, "that I would be a good girl, and that I would ask God not to let me be naughty again."

She and her sister Hattie, not quite two years her elder, lived out of doors a great deal. They were very fond of flowers and animals, and, hand in hand, would wander up and down the street to stop and admire the flowers in the neighboring gardens, always mindful of their mother's injunction never to take a flower without permission. Happy indeed were they when they could bring home a handful of wild flowers to their mother. "God's flowers" they called them, because they did not grow in anyone's garden.

Clara's love for animals led her to pat every dog she met, and more than once she caught a stray cat and took it home to pet it. A story is told that seeing a lame chicken she wrapped it in her apron and took it home and bandaged its leg neatly, tending it with such devotion that

she soon had the happiness of seeing it able to run about to seek its own food. The cousin who told this story laughingly said, "She probably used splints, but of this I am not sure."

Mrs. Swain's sister Elizabeth lived a mile out of the village, while the home of the Swain family was within the boundary line, and as the little red school-house was between them the children of both families attended this school.

Clara was very fond of her Aunt Post and often went home with her cousins, staying with them days at a time. One of these cousins, now eighty-eight years of age, writes: "When Clara was seven years of age she was a very pleasant child, always eager to help someone. She lived with us, off and on, until she was twelve years old, when we moved to Michigan. She was as much at home with us as in her own home and we were sorry to part with her."

CONVERSION

When Clara was eight years old her sister Ann, six years her senior, joined the Methodist Church, and this made a great impression on her youthful mind. The consistent life of this sister and the sweet and simple religious life of her mother gave her many thoughtful hours, and she asked one day, "Why am I not a

Christian? I want to be good, too." Just before she was ten years old, under the influence of a powerful sermon, she felt that she must give herself to the Lord to be his child forever. There were hours of darkness when she felt that she was too great a sinner to be forgiven, but light came at last and she was happy in the consciousness that she was an accepted child of God.

From her father's family she inherited a fund of Irish humor, while her mother, of good old New England blood, inclined to quietness of spirit with earnestness of purpose; and this blending of fun and sobriety caused the young Christian much perturbation of spirit. Conscientious in the extreme, she had many an hour of self-questioning when she feared that, in the exuberance of youthful merriment, she had cast a shadow on her Christian profession and caused sorrow to the heart of her loving Master. Then it was that the wise and tender mother helped her to see that it was the duty of a Christian, though only a child, to be cheerful and joyous, and that it was possible to please God in her play hours as well as in attendance at church or Sunday school or prayer meeting, — just to be the happy child that he meant her to be, and to ask his help to keep her good and true.