

1969-1989 Twenty Years of

Integrity

2919 Lafayette Ave.
Lansing, Michigan 48906

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
Permit No. 189

July/August 1989

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INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

Readers' Response

Please mail Norman Parks' *The Role of Women in the Church*. We want to encourage your efforts to edify the brethren. Like most works of men, some articles are outstanding. I recall many issues of *Integrity*, what a great name.

Love,
Howard S. Smith
Caruthersville, Missouri

Dear Bruce and Diane,

Thanks again for all the very obvious hours you put into the work on *Integrity*. Quality work always shows, and your publication is certainly that.

Yours in Him,
Jerry Daniel
Westfield, New Jersey

(Endnotes from page 79)

- ¹Exodus 20: 4
- ²Col. 3:5-6
- ³Eph. 5:5
- ⁴II Tim. 6:8
- ⁵Luke 14:13
- ⁶Acts 10:28
- ⁷Hebrews 4:12
- ⁸Acts 10:26
- ⁹Gal. 3:28
- ¹⁰Acts 10:34
- ¹¹I Cor. 1:28-29

- *The phrase "obey the law of the land" was widely quoted when the laws were Jim Crow.
- ¹²Mat. 5:22
 - ¹³II Sam. 1:19
 - ¹⁴II Sam. 1:20
 - ¹⁵Matthew 8:12
 - ¹⁶Eph. 3:8
 - ¹⁷Ex. 34:29
 - ¹⁸II Cor. 5:1
 - ¹⁹Gal. 5:22-23
 - ²⁰Job 42:5-6

Editorial: Reading and Growing

Carl Ketcherside
Leroy Garrett

Cheering Us On
Diane G. H. Kilmer

Variations in Integrity
Amos Ponder

Fruit in His Season
Laurie L. Hibbett

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Editors

Diane G.H. Kilmer
J. Bruce Kilmer

Integrity Address

2919 Lafayette Ave.
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Reading and Growing

One of our regular readers once encouragingly wrote: "*Integrity* is a 'good read.'" We hope that this July/August issue will also qualify as satisfying to your mind and spirit. When we learned that brother Carl Ketcherside had died May 24th, we asked brother Leroy Garrett, a close friend of Carl's, if he would write a few words for *Integrity* regarding brother Ketcherside's life. God caused Carl Ketcherside to be a dynamic force for unity among Christians in America in this century, and his influence has spread worldwide. Leroy's tribute encourages us by letting us know a little bit more about Carl's personal faith. This issue also includes a short response by Diane on Carl's life. We were some of the thousands who were acquainted with brother Carl through written correspondence, and his impact upon all our lives is immeasurable.

To continue celebrating *Integrity's* 20th year of publication, Amos Ponder, longest-serving *Integrity* board member, was asked to tell his perspective of the beginnings of this magazine. We think his narrative "*Variations in Integrity*" is personal and interesting.

Last month a gem of a manuscript came in the mail unsolicited, sparkling with humor and wisdom, reflecting drama and pathos. "Fruit in His Season," written and submitted by Laurie L. Hibbett, was first published in *Restoration Review* during the summer of 1960. Almost thirty years later, its message is timeless and thought-provoking.

Some of you have told us that the first thing you read in *Integrity* is the fictional *Intercepted Correspondence* between Uncle Apollyon and Ichabod. Not only was Jesus a master storyteller, he was the original artist of creation. His own example led us to prepare a most unusual "first" for *Integrity* magazine: the entire September/October issue is devoted to creative Christian art. Fiction, poetry, essays and graphics have been collected by friends of *Integrity* from Abilene, Texas. The whole *Integrity* editorial board looks forward to presenting you with a unique issue.

May God continue to bless you. And may you find this July/August issue to be "a good read."

Diane and Bruce Kilmer
Co-editors

Carl Ketcherside

LEROY GARRETT

During the summer of 1988 in Hartford, Illinois I was on a program with Carl Ketcherside for the last time. While reporting on his ministry in the inner-city of St. Louis he told the audience about Old Gus, his favorite drunk. He noted that Gus was never quite able to see how religion could help him with his drinking problem, but Carl saw in him a good heart, one who never rejected God's grace if he never quite knew how to accept it. One morning they found Gus dead in an alley. He had frozen to death after passing out in a drunken stupor. Carl told of how he went to the morgue for one last visit with his old friend. Then he said to us with disarming compassion, "I wonder what God will do with old Gus."

I was touched by the way Carl said that, as if God might show mercy to a poor drunk that never seemed able to get his life together. I thought of the Carl Ketcherside that I met 40 years earlier, who would then have known exactly where all drunks go when they die, and he would have quoted Scripture to prove it.

He was once a "wing commander," to use his term, of one of the most legalistic sects among Churches of Christ, and he accepted only those who conformed to his party line. When I met him for the first time there was some question in his mind as to whether he could fellowship me. I had to pass his litmus test, and since I was as sectarian as he was, he had to pass mine! But in the years that followed we embarked together upon a great adventure, freedom in Christ.

This I would name as the essence of Carl Ketcherside's long and fruitful ministry: his capacity to change course and move in a different direction. Like Alexander Campbell before him, who confessed that "I was once so strict a sectarian that I was like the Indian's tree in that I leaned a little the other way." Carl often

admitted that he was once factious and divisive and that he had asked God to forgive him. He was able to give the last half of his life as a peacemaker and was an envoy of unity. He believed that his most important discovery was that peace and unity could never come to God's people through argument or debate but only through forbearing love. "Only the dynamic of love will do it," was his continual theme.

The change began for him in a humble frame church in Belfast, Ireland, where he had gone as a missionary, representing his sect in America. He had such experiences in Ireland with leaders of the church at large that he came to see himself for what he was, a leader in a narrow American sect. Troubled by the fact that his sectarian message had no meaning outside his own little party, he repaired one wintry night to the little church. Alone and cold, he laid his soul bare before the God of heaven, confessing his sectarianism. Even though he had then been preaching since boyhood and had baptized thousands, he did what he had never done before: he invited Jesus into his heart. And as he liked to put it, when Jesus came into his heart there was no room left for the factious spirit. He resolved that he would henceforth be "a peacemaker and no longer a piecemaker." He had a way with words!

He enjoyed telling how a "Vacancy" sign hung over his heart, but when Jesus moved in he took down the sign and hung up another, "Occupied," and since that time life has never been the same.

Even though he had only a high school education, he was unusually knowledgeable. This was due not only to a gifted intellect but to a lifetime of consummate reading. Even as a boy he read everything he could get his hands on. Along the way he learned to think — critically, creatively, boldly. He often plowed new ground in his

study of Scripture, *Mission Messenger*, which he edited for 37 years. He had a way of couching these insights in language that sparkled, such as: "Wherever God has a child, I have a brother or sister," and "We have no right to make anything a test of fellowship that God has not made a condition for going to heaven."

Shedding the Shackles

Some of the distinctions he made went far in freeing people from sectarian shackles, such as the difference between fellowship and endorsement, that is, we can fellowship a person without endorsing or approving of all that he may believe or practice. The distinction he drew between the apostolic proclamation (gospel) and the apostolic teaching (doctrine) was also effective, the former being what creates fellowship and the latter being what enriches fellowship. Most liberating of all may have been the distinction he drew between the New Testament (*New Covenant* is better he would note) and the New Testament Scriptures. The New Testament is not the 27 books that we call the "New Testament," but the covenant relationship we share in Christ through faith and baptism. It disturbed some people to be told that issues like speaking in tongues, societies, and instrumental music are quite apart from the New Covenant and the gospel of Christ. It also set folk to thinking when they were told, "All truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important."

Another ingredient to his genius was his eternal optimism. He was always up and never down, and he was always out on the growing edge. He was convinced that this is a great time to be alive, and that we are at the very brink of a glorious reformation of worldwide proportion. In short, he was a believer, not only in God but in himself, in the goodness of humanity and the future of the world. That he was planning to remarry after 60 glorious years of marriage to his beloved Nell indicates that he died 81 years young rather than 81 years old.

Carl had a way of giving people hope, even a drunk or a prostitute on the street. He made people feel better about themselves just by be-

ing around him. Like his Lord, he sought to save people, not to condemn them. Being in his company was sheer entertainment.

A born public speaker, he was an orator of the old school. Even as a boy he won forensic contests. He began preaching when only 12, standing on a box so that he could be seen from behind the pulpit, and he was holding revivals at age 13. His hosts would call him in from playing marbles, saying, "Come on, Carl, it will soon be time for you to preach." Whether for his own good or ill, he was billed as the boy wonder preacher. He wore knee pants until he was a teenager. The elders of one church told him that if he was going to be a preacher he needed to discard his knee pants, so they took him to town and bought him his first suit — with long pants! He could move an audience as few people can. One man who often heard him in his prime was recounting the large numbers that Carl baptized, and added, "It was hard to stay in your seat with Carl Ketcherside preaching." Even in his latter years it was common for him to receive a standing ovation when he pleaded for unsectarian Christianity, as he did at the World Convention of Churches of Christ during its San Juan assembly.

We miss the real Carl if we do not recognize his delightful sense of humor and his gift of repartee, which would sometimes be caustic without being vindictive. Once when I was with him at an ACU lectureship I noted that a certain "lofty" preacher from Tennessee was labeled by some as a pompous ass. Carl fired right back with "That would be an improvement over what he was when I knew him!" He believed an audience would listen to him with less prejudice if he could give them something to laugh about. The only time he ever spoke at ACU he ran the risk of having a prejudiced audience. When scoring the shallowness of our sectarian thinking he said at one point: "And there's the division over Herald of Truth. Those who support it never watch it, and those who oppose it never miss it!" I noticed that the president of the college was laughing as was most everyone else.

Those of us who were his contemporaries and

knew him personally were uniquely blessed. I am confident that he will have a noble place in the history of our people. Future generations will be blessed by his writings, his ministry, and his life; and they will honor him more than we have.

A few lines from Edwin Markham catch the essence of Carl Ketcherside's life and work:

*For all your days prepare,
And meet them ever alike:
When you are the anvil, bear —
When you are the hammer, strike.*

Cheering Us On

DIANE G. H. KILMER

Just two weeks before he died on May 24th, I had my last telephone conversation with Carl Ketcherside. In the past, most of our correspondence over articles for *Integrity* have been written, and I have kept his notes. Carl's writing is at least as powerful and effective as his preaching, so it would make Bruce and me chuckle to receive superior manuscripts from him that would include handwritten notes like: "let me say that if it is not satisfactory, please file it in the round file and thus prepare it for its final resting place in the dumpster. I will love you just as much and may even respect your judgment even more than otherwise."

As we prepared "A Hope-Full Future," the article Carl specifically wrote for *Integrity's* 20th anniversary issue (May/June), it seemed necessary to get a sentence or two clarified, so I called him. Cheerful, articulate, and busy — he was on his way to the Cornerstone inner-city ministry — brother Carl gave his full attention and willingly hammered out the paragraph with me over the phone, throwing in the spelling of "deleterious" for me into the bargain. When we were done with our business, I told him how much Bruce and I admired the

He was often the anvil, and he knew how to bear. He was sometimes the hammer, and he knew how to strike.

Leroy Garret has a Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University. He is a teacher and writer known in all three branches of the Restoration Movement. He is the editor and founder of *Restoration Review* and author of *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, a 739 page anecdotal history of three churches, published in 1981 by College Press. He and his wife, Ouida, live in Denton, Texas where he serves as an elder of the Church of Christ.

way he never really retired, but continued, instead, to fill his days serving the Lord. Carl modestly thanked me, and admitted that he was "working harder now than I was 20 years ago!"

Perhaps you can imagine how glad I am that I got to tell Carl Ketcherside how much we appreciated his life and example. Through his positive, loving nature, Carl has tried to nullify our sectarian fences and inspire us to live without their kind of security. Just four months ago a minister called from Arizona and told me that he had debated Carl Ketcherside more than 15 years ago about the open-armed fellowship Carl advocated. The minister said he could not recall what Brother Ketcherside had said, but Carl's attitude had been unforgettably kind and loving toward him. The minister concluded that the love of God he saw in Carl caused him to reassess his own legalism and he finally worked free from it 10 years later. He telephoned Carl in March to tell him "thanks."

To one couple, Ketcherside once wrote in regard to religious division: "Nothing is as important as Jesus. Beside Him all else is secondary and of a minor nature. . . I am no longer affiliated with anything 'religiously' except the

One Body. I find myself a 'disciple at large' in the religious world, free to accept any saint, and free to reject anything which many would seek to bind upon me. It will all turn out right in His good time and I am glad."

His gladness is infectious and I was smiling when I hung up the phone after speaking with him in May. Carl Ketcherside has finally retired to be with the Father. I hope to follow his life's example.

Editor's Note:

The following was our last note received (along with his manuscript) from Carl Ketcherside. He mentions receiving some past *Integrity* issues that he had missed, then describes his work in St. Louis. We thought you might want to read it:

Variations in Integrity

AMOS PONDER

In 1968 I was one of a group of people (mainly preachers) in the Flint, Michigan area who got together to study and rethink some of the traditional views of the Church of Christ. Some of the subjects we discussed were: our views on the Lord's Supper, the authority of elders, and whether or not we were the only true church. These discussions led to problems with some elders and preachers (both in and out of our discussion group) who thought things had gone too far. Many of the preachers decided to "retrench," as one person put it. Those who continued in this type of open thinking were threatened with excommunication. Finally, one preacher, one elder (this writer), and one entire congregation were cut off. That congregation is now known as the Fenton, Michigan Church of Christ/Christian Church. Another congregation in the area also divided.

Bruce, my dear brother,

I have read the papers you sent with joy unspeakable. I cannot thank you enough for the sheer pleasure you gave me. And I saw Amos Ponder's name on the envelope. What a pleasure!

I am sending you the manuscript. As is usual I am hardly satisfied by what I have done but I submit it as the best I can do now. I am working very hard at the Cornerstone. God is gracious to us. We got four tons of clothing yesterday in one huge truckload. God is good to us. The women are sorting it out today. I am teaching three times per week and preaching on the Lord's Day. God bless you and keep you.

Carl

It was while these events were coming to a head that about 12 people in the area got together to start a publication. The result was *Integrity*, a monthly publication which was mailed mostly to the people in the Church of Christ in Michigan.

The traditional doctrines of our particular branch of the Restoration Movement were not of any great concern to me at the beginning of 1968. I was an elder in a large congregation of approximately 750 members. We had a new building and were still growing. We had a young, energetic preacher who also had an inquiring mind. Being fresh out of college, he was supposed to have all the answers. But he had confessed to the elders that he no longer knew all of the answers, but was searching for the truth. Somehow what he was saying made sense to me and we began to study together. Unfor-

tunately, this did not last too long, because our preacher was soon disfellowshipped and my demise as an elder and member of the church followed shortly afterward. It was during all this turmoil that I began to do some serious studying and thinking about what I believed and also who I was.

My view of integrity at this time was to know where I stood, to take a firm stand and to be completely honest concerning my views. Unfortunately, I also thought I had to get everyone else straightened out and that this could best be done through the *Integrity* journal.

The few articles that I wrote in the early years of *Integrity* were not only a statement of a particular view, but were also a barb intended to penetrate to the heart of those who were not willing to open their minds, particularly those in the area who were casting God's people out of the Church. For years I had been unable to be completely honest with others about beliefs that were different from the norm. I suppose that this was to keep from disappointing those with whom I wanted to be in fellowship.

Something that seems bad in a person's life (such as being disfellowshipped) can later be considered a great blessing. At first I wanted to rebel. Now I realize that what happened to me has helped me to grow in ways that nothing else could have accomplished. Realizing this, I pray for those who are being disfellowshipped yet today for their beliefs, that they may also find a blessing in what has happened to them.

For me, rebellion was part of the motivation for *Integrity* in its early years. But as our Board expanded and new writers contributed, we have become less rebellious and less parochial. As *Integrity* has changed it has helped me to change. In the beginning I thought that I had attained integrity in all its aspects and I was trying to help others do the same. But, as one board member reminded us in a recent meeting, "We do not possess perfect integrity; we pro-

mote it among ourselves as well as to our readers."

Probably the greatest change in me over the last twenty years is to realize my ignorance. In I Corinthians 8:2 Paul says, "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know." Until a person realizes that he does not fully understand a subject, he is not open to be taught on that subject.

Giving a description of the Fenton Church of Christ-Christian Church where I am an elder may be the best way to illustrate some of the changes in my thinking and doing. The congregation has become a combination of three different groups: two from the Church of Christ (a cappella) and one from the Church of Christ (instrumental). The piano and organ are used only on Sunday morning and then only for the first two or three songs. The rest of the worship is a cappella, as is the Sunday evening and Wednesday evening worship. We have people who are charismatic, anti-charismatic, premillennial, evolutionists, creationists, and those who simply believe in God, not knowing what any of the above means.

I believe this example of unity is how the church must be to be in harmony with God's will. Everyone on both sides of all these views may be partly right and partly wrong. But when we gather together as God's children, we study and encourage each other and we strive to come to a better understanding of God's word. We all need help in understanding His word and in making it effective in our lives in today's confusing society. It is my prayer that *Integrity* can contribute to the encouragement, study, understanding, and unity of God's people.

Amos Ponder is vice-president of the *Integrity* board and an original board member. Besides serving as an elder at the Fenton Church of Christ-Christian Church, Amos has also preached and helped start new churches in the area. He has retired from General Motors and presently resides in Flint, Michigan with his wife, Janet.

He who walks in integrity walks securely. Proverbs 10:9

Fruit in His Season

LAURIE L. HIBBETT

To begin the story of Brother Rockwell is to recall the summer of 1927 when he came to live among us. He and his family moved from Ohio to our neighborhood in Middle Tennessee where they settled on a small farm directly behind my grandfather's. The wagon road that led to our barns and back pastures was their only outlet to the highway and although Grandpa gave him permission to use this road, Brother Rockwell was a trespasser of sorts from the start.

We soon learned that in addition to farming, he was some kind of preacher. "But he's in error, of course," Grandpa told us.

Of course we already knew this for he was not of our faith. Error was the viewpoint of anyone who disagreed with us about religion. The Bible was our handbook and our policy admitted no right to interpret. True, we had preachers to assist us in dividing it aright, but our instruction from them was simply emphasis and re-emphasis on what we and they already believed. We lived in a religious minded community composed mostly of members of our church, the rest churchgoers in their own faiths. The mission of our brotherhood was to correct the error of these other denominations or "sects" as we called them. We existed to defy and demolish them. We were, in fact, the sect to end sects. As I look back on it now, it seems that we actually worshipped our own image instead of God, and were sick and starving spiritually like the beautiful Greek who fell in love with his own reflection and wasted away with the futility of self love.

With two men like Brother Rockwell and Grandpa, positions were soon stated and battle lines sharply drawn. Grandpa said he would wait for an opportune time to present the truth to Brother Rockwell. But the opportunity came about in an unexpected way. It happened as a result of my friendship with one of the Rockwell

children. I had constructed a miniature garden around what I called a pool though it was actually only a kitchen bowl sunk in the ground. This was edged with moss and interspersed with rocks. The hole had a small rock wall. There were endless possibilities for re-arranging and improving this landscape and that was how I spent my days all that summer. When Mary Rockwell, a girl my own age, came to play that first time, I could see her quick appreciation for this artistry and in a burst of gratitude I gave her a china horse, one of my favorite toys. It was about such an improbable thing that Brother Rockwell and Grandpa had their first religious discussion. While we were at supper that night, Brother Rockwell knocked at our door. He had come to return the horse. No protest on my part, no reassurance from Grandmother could dissuade him. Kindly but firmly he insisted that mine it must remain.

"I don't understand you, Brother Rockwell," Grandpa said, "Surely you don't think your child stole it?"

"Oh, no, she didn't violate the Eighth Commandment," he said. "But I can't allow her to break the Second either. Even in innocence." He had reached the door now and was about to be off.

"The Second Commandment!" Grandpa exclaimed. He paused a moment, then said slowly as if thinking aloud: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. . ."¹

I was seized with sudden fear. Was my horse then a graven image? Had I violated a command of God unwittingly? Uzzah, steadying the ark of the covenant with good intention, was struck dead on the spot. "Remember Uzzah" was a watchword of our church, for no story so well illustrated the relative nature of God as we were

taught to see Him. Had I then, like Uzzah, made the one false move that placed me beyond redemption?

When Brother Rockwell had gone we all started talking at once.

"You should never have started out calling him 'Brother,'" Grandmother said to Grandpa, "Especially since you're an elder."

"Why won't Brother Rockwell read the Bible and do what it says?" I asked. I could not understand what happiness he found in willful disobedience to God's word. With nothing to gain financially and heaven to lose eventually, why *would* he persist in error? It made no sense.

"He does read the Bible but he doesn't interpret it right," Grandmother said.

"I thought we weren't supposed to interpret it. I thought we were just supposed to do what it says."

"We have to divide it aright," Grandmother said, "But don't you worry about it. Mr. Gurney will talk with him and maybe he can be converted to the truth."

When I said my prayers that night I prayed that Brother Rockwell might be led to see the truth. I hated to think of eternal punishment for such a kindfaced, soft-spoken old man whose worst fault was a strangely literal interpretation of the Bible. It was rare to find someone more literal-minded than those of our own group but we knew of course that while some Bible language was literal some too was figurative. The delicate task of making the distinction was reserved for our preachers. But Brother Rockwell, being from Ohio, did not know this.

The next morning, Grandpa and I called on the Rockwells. Grandpa came right to the point. "Brother Rockwell, we aren't through on the subject of this toy. Now you and I differ religiously and I'm not saying you don't have a right to your opinion as far as this country is concerned. But as far as the Lord is concerned, you don't. 'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death,' Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 12. Now wouldn't you thank me if I pointed out the right way to you?"

Then he said, as was our custom when beginning a discussion with sectarians, "Let's just take the Bible as our guide and if you find any

way I'm wrong I'll be glad to change, and if I find anything you're wrong in, you'll change. Isn't that fair?" This was said like a litany. The response was yes.

"In the first place, Brother Rockwell, you are not rightly dividing the word of truth as we are commanded to do in Second Timothy, 2:15. The second commandment is in the Old Testament. We are under the New Testament now."

Brother Rockwell said he knew that, but did Grandpa mean that it was all right to worship idols now?

Grandpa flushed as he did easily with his ruddy coloring. "Don't put words in my mouth, Brother Rockwell. You know perfectly well that a china horse is no idol like the golden calf."

Brother Rockwell stood up. "I guess I didn't make myself clear," he said, reaching to the mantelpiece for his Bible. He turned to a passage and began to read aloud: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil, concupiscence, and *covetousness which is idolatry*: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."² It struck me as strange that he did not give chapter and verse as our preachers always did. Perhaps he felt that the proof of the passage was in its message rather than its documentation.

Then he turned to another passage and again read aloud:

"For this ye know that no whoremonger, nor unclean person nor *covetous man who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."³

He closed the book gently and replaced it. "Covetousness is the New Testament definition for idolatry. Mary may have coveted the horse, I fear, because she hasn't one like it. That's why I didn't want her to keep it. Mrs. Rockwell and I are teaching our children to seek spiritual riches instead of material novelties."

We sat there speechless, Grandpa and I. I looked around at the Rockwell children and noticed that they seemed happy and that the eyes they turned to their father were full of love and admiration.

He turned to me and said kindly, "It's a nice

little plaything for those that prize such things, I guess, but you must begin training yourself away from all this.”

Then, to Grandpa, “Can’t you see that the seeking of the best toys, the most marbles and such, leads to covetousness in grown men and women? We teach them from babyhood to want *things*, whereas we are taught by our Master that ‘having food and raiment let us be therewith content.’ ”⁴

Brother Rockwell had come to his conclusion by a devious course of reasoning, but it was the kind of logic I was accustomed to, so I felt he had won the argument. On the way home I asked Grandpa if I had better stop collecting horses, remembering that he had promised to change any item in which we were not letter-perfect.

“No indeed,” he said, “That man is simply a fanatic!”

He said at the dinner table that day that Brother Rockwell was by far the hardest man to reason with he had ever met. Brother Rockwell was blind, simply blind, with prejudice.

Invited Guests

There seemed no end to Brother Rockwell’s absurdities. The big dinner he gave, for example, to which he invited a dozen of the town’s poorest citizens. In those days before public relief there were several in our town who lived from hand to mouth — some physically handicapped, some feeble-minded, others just shiftless. They ate where food was passed out to them or they begged. Grandpa never turned one away from his kitchen door empty-handed but certainly he did not ask them to come in at the front door and sit in the parlor talking and then come out to dinner and eat with our family. He would not expose himself to ridicule and his family to disease by such extreme behavior. But these unfortunates were the *invited guests* of Brother Rockwell at the first dinner party he gave in our town.

Grandpa took him to task about inviting Ivy Ringgold. “He never had a bath in his life.”

“Bathing isn’t such a simple thing for real poor folks,” Brother Rockwell said, “Soap’s

expensive for one thing. For another, Ivy would have to carry his water from Joneses spring, a good two miles from where he stays. I doubt if he owns a bucket.”

“Cleanliness is next to godliness,” Grandpa reminded him.

“It is good,” Brother Rockwell agreed. “However, we might count it a luxury some can’t afford. Now take Lazarus for example . . .”

Grandpa interrupted him. He was chuckling now. It was best after all just to take Brother Rockwell as a joke. “If you were purposely inviting the down and out, why didn’t you ask me?”

“According to the Lord, we are to invite ‘the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind’, and not our rich neighbors.”⁵

That’s the first time I was ever called rich,” Grandpa said, annoyed again.

“Then open your eyes and look about you. You’re a land owner, you set a good table. Your roof doesn’t leak. Think about the folks in your colored serton or those in Cotton Town (this was our factory district). I say you are rich, Brother Gurney,” he continued and this time he looked stern. “Think about what our Master owned when he was on earth. Then start counting up the things you own that he didn’t. How could a man call himself poor when he owns so much more than his Master did when he was on earth?”

Had we been better informed on social doctrines, I suppose we would have felt that Brother Rockwell was a Communist. Instead we thought maybe he envied our comparative prosperity.

There was one thing Grandpa had to admire about Brother Rockwell. He was a tireless worker. Next to soundness in the scriptures Grandpa esteemed industry and thrift. And though it was by this time apparent that Brother Rockwell was hopeless as far as straightening him out on religion, still he was admirable as a man who could put in a full day’s work, then study far into the night by an oil lamp or on Sunday go and preach for his church, that error-infested group of misfits. Most of his disciples were people who had not been church-goers before, for he did not proselyte. . . the town

drunk, once always good for a joke but now embarrassingly sober whenever you saw him, a notorious loafer for whom Brother Rockwell had somehow secured a job in the cotton mill, and strangest of all, a disagreeable old recluse who had never darkened a church door and was thought to be an infidel. In short, the rakings and scrapings of the community, people that nobody in the self-respecting churches, not even the deluded established sectarian churches, would be caught dead with. But we had yet to learn the sorry depths to which Brother Rockwell’s church had gone for its membership.

Since his farming brought in barely enough to sustain his family and he always needed money for his charities, Brother Rockwell hired out for a day or two a week to Grandpa. Many were the opportunities thus afforded for winning Brother Rockwell to the truth. Relentlessly Grandpa would encircle him with chapter and verse till he was quite surrounded. He had done this a dozen times or more. But as many times, just when it seemed that truth would triumph, Brother Rockwell would pick up some pebble from the Bible and let it fly at this giant of our faith. For, though a stranger in our gates, he refused to acknowledge our sole claim to our God and he would not allow *himself* to be cast in the role of the Philistine. He was not scornful of Grandpa’s beliefs but he was not deferential to them either. “Christians need have no fear of disagreeing if anger doesn’t enter into it,” he would say sometimes. But how could Grandpa help but be angry when Brother Rockwell would not receive the truth?

“I don’t understand your quarrel with me,” Brother Rockwell would say, “I *am* a Christian, we *are* brothers so far as I am concerned. What more do you want of me?” Grandpa would be glad to explain at length. Brother Rockwell had been baptized but not for the right reason, he did take the Lord’s Supper but not on the right day. The strange thing was that he had his own set of chapters and verses to prove the things he did in his church but they were not the ones we had memorized so they did not even sound like the Bible to me. Bate Jefferson, the colored man who worked for Grandpa, would laugh and shake his head. “They both

too smart for me,” he would say, “Jesus gonna save me is all I know.”

Strangely enough, out of this deadlock there emerged in time a solid friendship between Grandpa and Brother Rockwell. Though he yielded to no one on sound doctrine and though Brother Rockwell was in a state of utter confusion on this score, Grandpa could but give honor where honor was due. As a dedicated religious man and a fantastically hard worker, Brother Rockwell commanded respect.

The Disloyal Servant

One evening when they came in from the fields and on to our house to wash up, they found Bate Jefferson waiting there for his money. When Brother Rockwell was ready to leave he turned to Grandpa to shake hands, which was one of his customs at every meeting or parting. Then he did something I had never seen before between white and colored: he shook hands with Bate Jefferson. “See you tonight at prayer meeting, I trust, Brother Jefferson,” he said as he left.

Grandpa was too surprised to say anything for awhile. “Does Brother Rockwell have a mission church for you all nigras?” he asked finally. A sectarian group had started a mission church for negroes which motivated our own brotherhood to counter-attack with a mission of our own (for where error had pioneered we must follow with correction and a little band of sectarians however weak and far-flung gave us more concern than whole continents of pagans). But our own plan for a negro mission had fallen through, for as one brother so aptly put it “The truth has been preached in this town enough to convert all of Niggertown if they had a mind to accept it.”

“And if they were allowed in our church house,” someone might have added, but no one did.

“No sir,” Bate was saying, “He don’t have no mission. We just go on in the same church. He got a sign on the door ‘All Races Welcome’ and his church is right near my house.”

Brother Rockwell’s church was indeed on the border of the colored district and the poor white section, another example of his poor judgment.

This property was worthless and he would never get back out of it what he had put into it, nor would such a location attract the substantial citizens who make up the good solid backbone of a congregation. He had no business sense whatever.

Left alone with Grandpa and me, Bate appeared miserable. He knew our code and then he had broken it. He knew that as a leper by our proclamation he was to cry out when approached too closely. But Brother Rockwell had come near to him and Bate had failed to call "Unclean."

He paused as if wondering whether to make his next remark, took a deep breath and said it anyway, "He preaches real good, Mr. Gurney." It was an apology of sorts. But it was also a declaration of independence and we knew it.

Grandpa's hands were trembling as he drew on his coat to go in to supper. He was staggering under a blow struck at the heart of our racial code, a code as sacred to us, as binding on us as children of God as were the purity laws given through Moses to His other chosen people long ago.

"Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God had showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."⁶ Grandpa could have been reliving the experience of Peter when he had gone in to Gentiles for the first time and had eaten with them. But he was not thinking of Peter. He thought only of Noah's Old Testament curse on the son of Ham whom we had decreed to be the father of the Negro race. He did not think of the New Testament blessing without which he himself would still have been an outcast.

Was part of his agitation the first stirring of a new tie of brotherhood forced into his resisting heart as a side effect of the new birth he was about to undergo, a birth which would change his relationship to everyone, even to himself?

I knew there would be no jokes at our table that night for we were shaken with the enormity of Brother Rockwell's crime and most of all with the disloyalty of our own Bate Jefferson who, after our fashion, we loved and who in

our approved way we wished to be loved by. We were honestly and deeply devoted to him in a master-servant relationship but that was how it had to stay; we could not endure him man to man.

Grandpa was a Christian, or as we said in our brotherhood, "a member of the church," with every fibre of his soul, at least with every warp fibre of his soul; as for the woof, that thread running the other way, interlocking to make the whole cloth, this thread of Grandpa's soul was *Southern*. "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."⁷ This seems to describe what went on in Grandpa's breast after he learned that the negroes were allowed, even urged, to attend Brother Rockwell's church. The pull between the warp and woof of the good honest cloth that was my grandfather, came close to the splitting of threads. No wonder the material was never again so sure of its strength, so proud. But it was becoming far more serviceable.

A Way of Life

Renouncing our Southern way of life was, for Grandpa, like parting with his right arm. It could only be done by transcending his sectarian loyalty for a higher allegiance. Our church leaders had never intimated that such a cleavage was necessary, in fact they had scriptures to prove that our system, even during slavery, was approved by God. Brother Rockwell, however, had not learned the same chapters and verses about the question. He was applying New Testament scriptures to a situation that had, according to our belief, been settled in Genesis. So while we were teaching our negroes to continue to bow down, Brother Rockwell was now in the process of lifting our own Bate Jefferson to his feet, refusing his obeisance, saying as Peter had said to the Gentiles: "Stand up; I myself also am a man."⁸

By the time Grandpa worked again in the field with Brother Rockwell a fiery cross had burned in his churchyard and the whole town was afire with the sensation.

I had gone to the field to carry their bucket of drinking water to them and found them deep in discussion.

"I suppose it means nothing to you, Brother Rockwell," Grandpa said, taking the dipper and drinking deeply, "that this town has been thrown into an uproar and lives endangered by your violation of God's own natural law. All the scripture you can quote won't shake me on that, so don't quote any more. I've heard enough! I won't listen!" I had never seen him so angry.

Brother Rockwell did not seem to notice anything wrong. "Why, Brother Gurney, is that the opinion of a man who finds in the Bible a solution for every problem? The Bible is plain about all races being one in Christ Jesus. Seems like if the folks in your church go by the Bible as close as you say, you'd have found that out by now. At least some of you."

Grandpa could no longer contain his wrath. "Don't you dare speak a word against the Church," he shouted, "You scripture-quoting devil!"

With that he flung down the dipper and stalked off. I picked up the dipper and put it back into the bucket. Pieces of dirt that had stuck to it floated up to the water's surface.

"I'll get you some more water," I said to Brother Rockwell, glad of an excuse to leave.

"No, I'm not thirsty," he said, "At least not for that kind of water." He seemed very tired.

Neither Male Nor Female

I felt required to make conversation. "Grandmother wants me to stay in the house more and learn to sew and cook," I said, "But that's not what I like to do. I would rather have been a boy."

Brother Rockwell seemed to have forgotten about the flaming cross and Grandpa's fiery words, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,"⁹ he said. "Be a follower of the Lord and do what will serve Him best, that's all."

"Is that in the Bible?" I asked, for I had never heard it and I knew it did not apply to

salvation or our preachers would have preached it.

"The quotation is, yes," he said.

"You know a lot about the Bible, Brother Rockwell," I said politely, "in fact, more than anyone I ever knew who was in error." With this remark I left him, happy in the belief that I had toned down Grandpa's hard words with a compliment.

Grandmother had already heard about it when I got home. "Mr. Gurney says Brother Rockwell quoted lots of scripture trying to prove the nigras are as good as we are," she said. "I knew from the first he was a trouble-maker."

"Brother Rockwell said a nigra can be born again into the same family with us," I said, "What did he mean by that?" Without pause, I continued, "He says that God is no respecter of persons,¹⁰ that God has chosen the base things of the world and things which are despised to bring to nought. . . and something about 'no flesh should glory in His presence.'¹¹ He says, was the apostolic church segregated by races, and. . ." I was trying to recall everything he said before I forgot it.

"We don't need a man from Ohio to come down here and tell us about nigras," Grandmother said. She started for the kitchen and I followed her.

When we passed the parlor door I would have gone in but she stopped me.

"Don't go in there now," she said.

I knew then that Grandpa was there alone. He was reading the Bible or praying as he always did when troubled.

It was a long time before he joined us in the kitchen. He looked worried and serious, as if he had discovered something he did not wish to know.

"There are some strange things in the Book," he said, "hard to understand exactly. The second chapter of James is one of the things Brother Rockwell wanted me to read. I can see in a way how a man from up North would come to his conclusion. But even if the way he takes that chapter is true, it would still be wrong to have white and colored mix the way he is doing at his church. It's against the laws of the land and we are to obey the law of the land ac-

cording to the Bible.* Brother Rockwell is wrong, I feel sure, but I won't have anything to do with breaking it up or taking sides. I can at least see where he gets his reason. I will have to say too that he knows more about the Bible than the crowd that burned the cross in his churchyard."

I asked Grandpa to come with me to see some things I had added to my garden but he said he was going out to find Brother Rockwell and apologize for the strong words and he wanted to apologize to me too for using them in front of me. He then set off and this time did not ask me to go with him.

That night as we ate supper Grandpa said solemnly, "I'll tell you all one thing. Brother Rockwell is deep." I could tell by his good spirits that the two were on good terms again. It was impossible to imagine Brother Rockwell being on anything but good terms with anyone.

The End of It

As to the outcome of the fiery cross, I don't know what it would have been if Brother Rockwell's unsegregated church had continued. Brother Rockwell was frail looking and thin, yet he seemed strong from the way he worked in the fields of his farm and ours and in his true field which was his church; but one day without having been sick at all he had a heart attack instantly fatal and so unexpected that it seemed like Enoch of old that "he was not, for God took him." The farm had to go back to the bank for he had taken no thought for the morrow and died penniless. In time Grandpa put Mrs. Rockwell and the children on the train for Ohio where their people still lived. There was no more talk about the fiery cross, for without the support of the Rockwells the little congregation soon drifted apart. That was the end of it, people thought.

Christianity is a fragile transplant foreign to this soil and apparently easily unrooted. But it is persistent and, in fact, cannot die as Christ Himself showed. So when its seed is dropped, however dead it may appear through the long winter, it will bear fruit in season. So goodness is not interred with our bones; it is only evil that is mortal and bound to die.

Sunday Afternoons

There was nothing nicer than to sit in our parlor on a Sunday afternoon and listen to the other elders or the preacher talk about the spread of the church and exchange anecdotes about how they had gotten the best of sectarians in conversation or debate. This was the stuff we fed our souls on and I suppose our souls waxed gross on it, so much did we consume. All of us were sitting there one Sunday with one of the elders and his wife who had come to call, and eventually the conversation turned to the subject of Brother Rockwell.

"I'm glad that little church he started broke up," Sister McKenna said, "For there are already too many denominations in the world. Don't you think a man is in danger of punishment for starting a church of his own, Brother Gurney?" she asked.

Grandpa hesitated a moment and I could tell he was trying to speak calmly and casually.

"Don't misjudge Brother Rockwell," he said, "He didn't start a church of his own. They have a church like that where he came from and it's what he was used to. He was trying to go by the Bible just like we do. Everything he did he went by the Bible for it. I know that to be a fact." I could see the blush rising in his sun-roughened skin.

"If he went by the Bible so close, why didn't he come to church with you?" Brother McKenna asked.

"I tried hard to get him to. But he had some ideas different from ours about the will of the Lord. Like foot-washing. He took John 13:14 to mean Jesus wanted us to continue, in foot-washing. And he wouldn't give it up, no more than we'd give up the Lord's Supper. He couldn't compromise on the truth, could he?"

"Why Brother Gurney, I do believe he's made a convert of you!" Here Sister McKenna smiled and winked at Grandmother. As well might she have suggested that Gibraltar crumble into the ocean like a loaf of sugar.

Brother McKenna took the floor then and explained that Grandpa had a natural affection for his old neighbor, but that we must never let our love for anyone blind us to their error. Then as if to express the sentiment of all, he pro-

nounced, "Mister Rockwell was a fine man in many ways, no doubt. He was just ignorant and prejudiced."

Here Grandpa made a confession of a new-found faith: "Brother Rockwell was not ignorant or prejudiced," he said.

It was simple statement of a fact as he saw it, and on that quiet Sunday afternoon he had no notion of the course of events that were to follow and to shake our little world. Once a hill is climbed a vista opens and a view is glimpsed so that even if one backs away he knows it is still there. Grandpa had climbed a hill and he would not deny what his eyes had seen.

"Brother Rockwell was not ignorant," he said, for that was what he saw.

"He did know a lot about the Bible," Grandmother put in nervously, "He quoted lots of scriptures but you know how the sectarians are."

"I never knew one yet who would listen to reason," Brother McKenna agreed.

"Brother Rockwell would listen to reason," Grandpa said, "He would listen to everything you said. And he would think about what you said and answer you. Sometimes it seemed like his was right."

"Am I to understand you to say that Mr. Rockwell was not in error, Brother Gurney?" Sister McKenna asked, leaning forward in her chair toward Grandpa.

"I don't know whether he was in error or not, any more than I know whether *you are*," he said. Then with another effort to calm himself he lowered his voice, "I know he knew as much about the Bible as any man I ever met."

Grandpa's Downfall

This was the beginning of Grandpa's downfall. His defection in the eyes of our church was that he had acquired a Christian virtue hitherto lacking in his make-up, and so conspicuously absent in the group as a whole that its addition in one member marked him as an oddity, no longer useful in the scheme of things. He had become merciful to those who disagreed with him, merciful to the point that he no longer felt them to be, after all, entirely wrong or ig-

norant. The word "fool" had never passed his lips; hell fire was the punishment for this as we all knew.¹² Now the lesson had gone deeper than his lips and he could no longer call another earnest man a fool even in his heart. This was his weakness. He had learned to love truly, without condescension.

When the McKennas had gone, each of us went to his separate tasks, Grandpa to milk, I to feed the chickens, Grandmother to put the cold remains of Sunday's dinner on the table for supper before we went back to church for the evening service. "When each can feel his brother's sigh and with him bear a part," we sang that night, though the wheels had already been set in motion which were to cause one brother many a sigh and not one among us bore any part with him. (Except for an old woman and a child who as females, for all their part counted, as far as their status was concerned, might as well have been two Hindus.) Who can say whether our group sang with spirit and with understanding as we repeated the words. This much we knew: we sang as the Scriptures commanded, for we sang without accompaniment.

One afternoon in the following week, two of the elders called on Grandpa. I was working on my garden when they drove up, rearranging some rocks and adding wild flowers which I hoped to root. After they left I went back into the house and found Grandmother and Grandpa both sitting in the parlor just like it was Sunday. The elders had asked him to resign.

It would be announced the following Sunday unless Grandpa felt he could go to the elders and straighten out his position to their satisfaction so that they might be assured that he was safe to be trusted with the feeding of the flock again.

"I can't understand it," Grandmother moaned, "Why couldn't you reason with them? You know more scriptures than any of them. You could have talked them out of it if you had tried."

"No," Grandpa said, "it was either admit Brother Rockwell was all wrong or else give up my post. I quoted more Scripture than either of them. They just couldn't see how Brother

Rockwell could differ from us and still follow the Bible. They kept on saying two people couldn't disagree and both be right. That's true — in a way. I just said I didn't know for certain whether Brother Rockwell was right or wrong. I don't actually *know*."

"You could have said it so it wouldn't rub them the wrong way, Mr. Gurney," Grandmother said. "You could have just told them he was in error. You know in your heart you think so!"

"I think so but I don't *know*." Grandpa said. "I think he was in error, yes. But then *he* thought I was too! How could I face the judgment saying he positively was wrong when he had some good points to his arguments? And was as good a moral man as I ever saw?"

"Morality won't save a man," Grandmother observed, "Look at Cornelius." It was one of the favorite church sayings. We put little stock in morality as it applied to salvation. "Mere morality" our preachers sometimes called it. Morality was very nice, of course. However, it was optional.

"I know that too," Grandpa said. "I only say Brother Rockwell was not an ignorant man nor prejudiced that I could see. And he did certainly know the Bible and tried to follow it. I don't know that he was entirely in error. God alone could know."

I felt that Grandpa had scored here, but Grandmother did not seem to think much of this argument.

"Oh, Mr. Gurney," she said, "to think I would live to hear you talk so weak," she drew in a long breath, "and not stand up for the truth."

It was all right to say Brother Rockwell was good; we knew he was, and the elders were wrong to insist that he was ignorant for we knew too that he was not, but it did look like Grandpa could just go along with them some and not say anything, just keep his own opinion of Brother Rockwell but not get the elders all stirred up the way he had. "Oh, to think we all have to suffer because you are so headstrong," she sighed.

Grandpa said no more but left the room. Grandmother went back to her endless tasks and I went back to my rock garden.

Preserve the Purity

After the regular Sunday service but before the dismissal, Brother McKenna stood before the congregation. He was silent for what seemed a long time, looking straight ahead. Then a hush fell on the room. Those who were still shuffling their songbooks and rousing their children to go home caught on even without seeing his face that something of significance was afoot, and instantly the hub-bub of mass boredom aching to be unleashed was shut off. Then Brother McKenna spoke, his words falling into this pool of expectancy like rocks splashed into a still pond.

He said there was one who had long been a faithful servant of the Lord and who for his good works and other qualifications had been entrusted with a position of authority as an elder. It was of this person that it was now his painful duty to speak. This man, he said, had fallen under an influence which made his faith waver and caused him to doubt the teachings of the church. It was not a question of immorality or of any act that was ungodly in a strictly moral sense. But to preserve New Testament Christianity in all its purity, it took men of stalwart conviction, men who would stand against error and doubt, men who had firm and unswerving allegiance to the gospel and who would "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," as commanded in Jude 3. He paused for emphasis and now you could hear a pin drop. Then he called Grandpa's name.

An elder, above all, Brother McKenna continued, must not, as it is written in Ephesians 4:14 be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every kind of doctrine." But this elder had almost embraced sectarianism in his strong defense of an erroneous opinion. In spite of the Bible's warning against wavering. In spite of First Corinthians 16:13 which admonishes us to stand fast in the faith.

This action, Brother McKenna said, had not been made in haste nor anger. Grandpa had been given time to think it through and retract, but he had only made more and more positive statements, following after a false teacher who had moved into his neighborhood, a man who

was in fact one of the very ones of whom the Bible warned when it said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Matthew, seventh chapter, verse fifteen."

And all the time Grandpa sat there in his Sunday best on the third row from the front, his head high, his cheeks blazing, but his blue eyes never flinching as he looked into Brother McKenna's face.

The news spread rapidly. "How are the mighty fallen,"¹³ the sectarians might now be saying with amusement for Grandpa was known as a pillar of our faith. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets at Askelon,"¹⁴ Grandpa would say with a deep sigh but it was published just the same. Most of the sectarians were surprisingly kind, however, and many expressed regret. "I always thought you were too good for that bunch," one neighbor said. But Grandpa was not pleased with this attempt at comfort. It was not for the heathen to disparage God's anointed.

Our relatives came from far and near to counsel Grandpa, for though he could never be trusted with a post of authority again, he could at least go up at the invitation song and confess error, thus making it right with God, and the congregation would forgive him.

Aunt Alta, his sister-in-law, came from Nashville on the bus to stay a week with us.

"Bedford," she said in her high-pitched positive little voice, "I mean to get to the bottom of this. Did that man convert you to his church?"

"Would I still be going to the one I've always gone to if he had, Alta?" Grandpa asked patiently.

"Then why did you get all this started about him knowing the scriptures?"

"He did know them, Alta. As well as you do. Or me. Or anyone I ever talked to."

"Then why didn't he follow it?"

"He did. The best he knew how. And he applied it to living like I never knew a man do before. That was the main thing."

Then they were off with a point by point summary of Brother Rockwell's practices in his

church. All of which Aunt Alta could refute with chapter and verse, and for all of which Grandpa could give chapter and verse on Brother Rockwell's side. It reminded me of Aaron throwing down his rod to become a serpent, proving the Lord was on his side, and then the magicians of Pharaoh's court threw down their rods too with the same result. (Only of course Aaron's serpents ate up Pharaoh's.) But there was no such miraculous evidence to settle this argument. Bible proofs were hurled down with equal vigor by first Aunt Alta and then Grandpa, but no quotation was so strong that it swallowed up the other.

"Bedford," Aunt Alta said at last when she had given up hope of appealing to him further, through the scriptures. "do you think it fitting to talk this way before this child? What is she going to believe when she grows up after she has listened to all this wishy-washy talk you've been doing? How can she believe anything when you're not strong for anything? When she grows up she will have no convictions whatsoever, and it will be your fault for sending her soul into outer darkness."

"Where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,"¹⁵ I said proudly, to show Aunt Alta I was really well trained in spite of her fears.

Aunt Alta told her Ladies' Bible Class back in Nashville that there was a growing tendency toward modernism in the church and her own brother-in-law, who had been a member since childhood, had fallen under this influence. He had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. She did not say what the mess of pottage was.

Times of Trouble

It was not our first experience with trouble. There was a mortgage on the farm and sometimes crops would fail just when notes would be due. And worse, Grandpa had lost his youngest son, my uncle, in the war that was called in those days simply 'the World War,' with no thought of a need for numbering. But always before we had had the church to turn to. Always there had been the other elders and the congregation, the warm security of sitting in the small auditorium a part of the familiar and close-knit group, so sure in their knowledge

of The Truth, and Grandpa surer than anyone, the one they turned to for the chapter and verse. Finances were nothing and, yes, even Death lost its sting when we were side by side among the brethren, our voice swelling in the songs of Zion or our minds following the words of the prayer-leader to whose "Amen" Grandpa always echoed a loud and staunch "Amen!" But now the place that had been our comfort was our cross; our place of refuge had become our own Gethsemane.

Risk and Reward

Now Grandpa found himself alone like Peter when he left the boat and his companions to walk on the waves to Jesus. When a man has said honestly "Lord, bid me come to thee," he must prepare for a faith such as he could never know, secure with his fellow sailors, the strong boards of the boat between him and the deep. Better never to attempt the perilous Christward journey, I suppose, than to perish in the waves of bitterness, loneliness and despair that assault the one who ventures forth alone; and except Jesus stretch out His hand to the wave-walker, he would indeed perish. The risk is great but the reward for one who dared it was the keys to the kingdom. So Grandpa pressed on toward the outstretched hand.

Now Grandpa read the Bible as he had never read it before. Not only at family prayer service, not only on Sunday mornings while the rest of us got ready and he waited in the parlor for us, not as he used to when sectarians visited us and he brought forth the Bible only to prove they were wrong. Now he read at noon when he came in for dinner and at evening while the rest of us were cleaning up in the kitchen and on warm nights when we would sit on the front porch talking among ourselves or with the neighbors. Where in the old days he had held forth as entertainer with his funny stories, now we could see his outline through the curtains as he sat inside by the lamp reading. Sometimes he would join us and say, "O, the unsearchable riches of Christ,"¹⁶ then he would go out into the yard and look up at the stars and come back looking almost like his old self before the bitter bread of humiliation had become his daily

portion. Not with the old grin and the jolly look he had then, but with a kind of radiance such as I fancied Moses had on his face when he came down from the mountain and the Bible says he "wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked."¹⁷

It seemed too that Grandpa liked to discuss the Bible more than ever but he did not talk so much about the same things and he listened to other people more. When the sectarians came to see us he would listen to what they had to say instead of doing all the talking himself and when he worked in the field with Bate Jefferson I could hear them talking about Jesus in a low voice and Bate would sometimes be talking too instead of only saying "yessir" to everything. We still went to church and it finally got so Grandpa could join in the singing again without his voice breaking.

One afternoon when I went to play in my garden, a sad sight met my eyes. Someone had left the chicken-yard gate open and the chickens had scratched it out of existence. The work of months had been demolished in moments by a few hard scratches from senseless hens.

"Don't take it too hard," Grandpa said, and I could tell that he felt bad about it. Then he started quoting from the Bible: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."¹⁸

The difference in Grandpa struck me suddenly for the first time. Where in the old days he had quoted the Bible only in religious disagreement and to point out the shortcomings of others, he now quoted it about everyday things that happened in our family, as if he thought about God all the time. It was so like Brother Rockwell.

I had been told not to bring up the painful subject of Brother Rockwell, but what Grandpa said and the way he looked reminded me so much of our old neighbor that I said before I thought, "That sounded just like Brother Rockwell used to talk, Grandpa!"

He was still looking down at the ruin. "Christians talk a lot alike the world over, I reckon," he said. It was the first time I had heard him refer to himself as a Christian instead of a

"member of the Church."

After Grandpa had gone I stood looking at the wreckage but for some reason I didn't feel sad about it. After a while I walked out of the yard and up the lane past our barns and vegetable garden and past Brother Rockwell's old place. Down this wagon road Mrs. Rockwell had walked one afternoon in sorrow but without show of excitement to tell us that Brother Rockwell, who always seemed so out of place in our community, had been called home.

As I passed their old house now untenanted I noticed that it was falling into decay and I thought of the futility of Brother Rockwell's life, his house almost gone, his place grown up in weeds, his church disbanded. He was remembered lovingly in our family, but he had estranged us from our natural habitat and left us lonelier than when he found us. What was the power of this man who had so affected Grandpa? It was not chapter and verse that had impressed him. We had reached the saturation point in this respect and were impervious to further pouring on of scripture. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.¹⁹ This was Brother Rockwell. Not that he spoke of these things (I don't recall that he ever did) but that he embodied them. If these traits lived out in the life of one man caused strife in our community, it was because such forces are positive and powerful. When confronted with them in a person, a man could no longer be a neutral in Christian warfare. We would have disdained his actual foot-washing but we could not prevent his washing our feet in unfeigned lowliness and back-breaking service. This was the way God had sought us in reconciliation by giving us the life of His Son, not to pass among us as a pamphleteer but as a living example. If this was the way for those who would answer His "Follow me," then clearly it was straiter, narrower, more fraught with danger, hardships and self-denial than we had been taught to suspect and each little spiritual gain would have to be won on a cross. It would be an insignificant cross compared with Christ's but the cross would grow with our spiritual strength until it would become more like His as we became more like

Him.

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."²⁰

So Grandpa, who has heard of God all his life, like Job had never truly repented until he had *seen* something of the Lord in the life of a humble man. Grandpa had ranked high in group conformity and the Bible quoting that had somehow or other been substituted for wisdom among us. But when he witnessed a life of constant self-denial in a man devoid of egotism, he knew himself at last for what he was. I think he was frightened by what he saw. It was that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom; not the fear that had been instilled in us by our own interpretation of the story of Uzah (which is the fear of slave to tyrant) but the fear of being unworthy of the love of the one you worship, and the ultimate fear which is hell indeed if realized (as everyone knows who has loved): the fear of being separated forever from that love without which life would be unbearable and eternity unthinkable.

After I passed Brother Rockwell's place, my thoughts turned again to my ruined garden, but with all the beauty of our countryside spread out around me, I knew I would never go back to a game with walled-in rocks. I was out in an open field now beyond any place I had ever explored but I kept on walking without looking back or even thinking about our fence rows and the boundaries.

Although this is a story, there are parts throughout that are quite real to many of us. The setting is authentic, according to author Laurie L. Hibbett, although "My grandfather would never have made such a concession." In the late 1950's, while working as a stenographer in order to support herself, her son and her mother, Laurie began to write short stories. Raised in the Churches of Christ in the Nashville area, Laurie said she is proud of her Restoration heritage. She is presently with the Episcopalian church.

(Endnotes on page 80)