



father's face for the first time while he read the Scriptures, sang, prayed and preached the sermon.

I was surprised at his magnetism and eloquence. He read the Bible with tenderness and force. He lined out the hymns in the most appealing way. The church could not afford many hymn books, so the custom was for the preacher to read two lines, the people sang them, he'd read two more and they sang them, until the hymn was completed. He read the lines beautifully.

"Rock of ages cleft for me

Let me hid myself in thee--"

And the congregation sang the two lines with a strange spiritual power.

I felt the grip of the audience in its collective emotions as well as the fascination of the speaker's face. It moved me profoundly. I was surprised at his simplicity when he prayed. His face shone with a marvellous faith that held me. Once I had lifted my head I couldn't take my eyes off him. He seemed to be talking intimately to God, a loving Father, and still the Almighty Ruler of the universe. His realization of God's nearness and omnipotence was awe inspiring. He preached with great power. His deep voice carried to the last corner and seat in the church, without strain. Most of his sermons were in the language of the Bible and used with wonderful skill in building his message.

His eye caught mine and I saw it flash with triumph.

He had become gravely anxious during the last few months for my conversion and baptism into the fellowship of one of his churches. There could be no coercion of any kind, of course. The Baptist faith was clear on this point. Infant baptism was an abomination in the sight of the Lord. "They who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth." The soul must see God face to face. No priest or minister could take God's place. Nor could faith be experience by proxy. The soul that would know God must seek and find for itself, must realize the presence of the Holy Spirit within its own heart.

I thought the preacher outdid himself that day in the tender power with which he drove this article of his faith into the hearts of all who heard.

He realized that the services had made a deep impression on me and the smile never left his face when he looked at me.

We said goodbye to the Schenks and drove back into Shelby in the gathering twilight, both of us in a meditative mood. Just before we got into town, he spoke to me casually without turning his head.

"We're starting a two weeks revival at New Prospect next Sunday, How would you like to attend the meetings?"

"You mean to quit work and go every day for two weeks?" I asked.

"Of course."

"Then I'll certainly go," I agreed without argument.

"You know, son," he went on slowly, "when you join the church I'd like it to be New Prospect--"

"That's funny," I interrupted, "That's the scrawniest church of all the four you preach to--"

"I know--"

"Then why do you want me to join that one? If I ever do, of course."

"Of course, if you ever do," he echoed gravely.

"It's built on the steepest hill in the county. I don't know why you like that place so well--"

"Would you like to know?" he smiled.

"I certainly would."

He began in tones that grew in tenderness as he went on.

"You remember the day I told you never to eat grapes in old man Crawford Durham's vineyard?"

I nodded.

"Well, there was a reason. The old man was a senior deacon in the Shelby church a long time ago when I preached there---before you were born.

One Sunday I saw a good Methodist minister in my congregation and

invited him into the pulpit and asked him to help conduct the services. He did, and made one of the most stirring prayers I'd ever listened to.

Old man Durham was a hide bound conservative in church discipline. He was furious and told everybody in church that I was guilty of the rankest heresy in thus recognizing a man who practiced infant baptism. I should be tried for heresy and expelled from the ministry. He would see to it.

The people in the church wouldn't listen to him, so he went all over the county and got a dozen strong Baptist Churches to send a delegation to a Council "to consider grave matters of discipline," Not knowing what it was all about the county churches sent delegates to meet at New Prospect.

"I was notified to appear and defend my action. My buggy broke down on the rough road this side of the church and I was late. I was surprised on arrival to find only the Deacons of New Prospect in a huddled group talking under an oak tree. There was no one else in sight. As I came up Deacon Jacob Holye met me with extended hand.

"We want to apologize, Brother Dixon, for allowing the use of the church today for that council. They never told us what it was called for, and when we found out, after they got in the building, that they had come here to try you for heresy, I jumped up and told the last one of them to get out and go home. There's be no council in our church. They all hurried out but old man Durham. I pushed him out. I nailed down the windows and locked the door. They've all gone."

He paused and smiled at his companions.

"We've just held a meeting of our Deacons out here and unanimously called you to the pastorate of New Prospect Church. Will you accept?"

"My heart was too full to speak. I could only grasp his hand.

"I've been pastor of that church, son, ever since. Your brother A. C. was baptized into it's fellowship. I never see the rough roads or the steep hill. I only see the smiling faces of my friends who believed in me. So that's why--you understand?"

I nodded slowly. "Yes, I understand."

I attended the revival meetings gladly. I'd been to two such gatherings before. The rich lunches spread at noon under the trees were well worth the trouble of attendance to say nothing of a vacation from work. I was in no hurry to get excited over religion. I would take my time, eat fried chicken and watermelons and think it over.

It was the end of the first week before I became interested. My father had preached with great power, rousing each day a storm of emotion that swept scores of men and women, boys and girls, to the penitent's seats. Finally I got up and went to the altar. I didn't kneel down, or cry or make a noise of any kind. I just sat in the pew and looked up at my father.

I tried to repent of my sins, but I couldn't think of enough I'd committed to make it worthwhile or fair for God to condemn me to the flames of an everlasting hell. I recalled without any conviction of sin the buxom girl who had taken me in her lap and kissed me that night I got off the reservation with Hose. I felt no sense of guilt when I recalled that I had kissed her. She asked me to. Of course I did lie to try to save her good name. But to save my life I couldn't feel sorry for that particular lie. Lying was wrong, of course, but not a little fib like that, told as a gentleman to help a lady in distress.

But my mind settled, at last, on the killing of the dog until the tears came. There I had sinned. I should have thought of the days of hunger he had endured. Of the abuse and neglect in his worthless master's house. The dog had to roam and forage for himself or die. And on an impulse of hate I had killed him. I cried real tears of repentance and asked God to forgive me. But the more I thought of it the worse I felt. Thinking seemed to aggravate the trouble. I mourned for two days. Then late on Sunday afternoon when we had returned home, I saw down and tried to figure it all out. I must be on the wrong track with this sobbing and mourning. God was good. Jesus was glorious in His compassion.

Why should I go through the world with a long face crying over sins. I would put my trust in Christ and surrender my life into His hands.

At sunset I went up to my room, knelt by the bed and said,

"Lord Jesus I give my life into your keeping!"

I had barely spoken the words when my heart was flooded with a sense of peace and joy. The burden had gone. The world shone with the glory of God. I laughed softly to myself. I had experienced religion. It was real. Nothing more real has ever happened in my life before or since that hour.

I told my father. His eyes filled with tears.

"You~~r~~ have been born again, of the Spirit, my son. You have realized the Presence of God in your heart and the Holy Sp~~i~~rit has filled your soul with His peace. You can come forward tomorrow in the church, declare your faith and be baptized."

I did so the next day and Frank followed me. I had no doubt about my own conversion, but Frank was only nine years old and I was a little afraid he didn't understand it quite clearly. But he did. So my father baptised us in a deep pool among the rocks of Buffalo Creek. The banks were lined with crowds of kindly people who sang the old hymns.

As I emerged from the water that day I little dreamed of the shadow about to close over my life that would put this religion to a supreme test.