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GOD'S WRECKING CREW -- A SERMON
By John B. Culpepper

Valdosta, Georgia

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[I have created this Table of Contents and numbered the items, the first of which I added myself. The following 20 of the 21 total items were bolded sub-points in the text of the sermon. -- DVM]

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01 -- ABOUT THE GRAPHIC ACCOMPANYING THIS FILE

Those of you who both view the graphic accompanying this file and read the sermon itself will see that the picture portrays things frequently seen by a modern "Wrecking Crew," while the concept of "God's Wrecking Crew" painted by the author of this file is, in fact, quite opposite from that of a destructive crew. Since nothing on the cover nor in the little booklet itself contained anything that would serve as a good graphic for the file, I set about finding the material for the graphic that I created -- before catching the author's meaning in the title. Nevertheless, I have chosen to leave the graphic connected with the sermon -- even though quite opposite concepts are involved. No doubt some over zealous Christians have, at times, been all too willing to be part of a supposed wrecking crew of God that goes about a very negative work of destroying. Theirs has been the desire to belong to a divinely appointed crew with only the first part of Jeremiah's commission seen in Jer. 1:10 -- "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down," while paying too little attention to the last part of that commission: "to build, and to plant." Perhaps my leaving the graphic with this file that portrays the negative concept of a wrecking crew will help to fix more clearly in the reader's mind what John B. Culpepper really intended to picture in the term, "God's Wrecking Crew." I hope so. If you have viewed the graphic, when you read the sermon, and you will understand much better what I have endeavored to explain in this paragraph. -- DVM

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02 -- IS IT WORTHWHILE?

Is it worthwhile that we jostle a brother
Bearing his load on the rough road of life?
Is it worth while that we jeer at each other
In blackness of heart -- that we war to the knife?
God pity us all in our pitiful strife?

God pity us all as we jostle each other!
God pardon us all for the triumphs we feel
When a fellow goes down 'neath his load on the heather,
Pierced to the heart. Words are keener than steel
And mightier far for woe or for weal.

Look at the roses saluting each other!
Look at the herds all at peace on the plain!

Man, and man only, makes war on his brother
And laughs in his heart at his peril and pain,
Shamed by the beasts that go down on the plain.

Were it not well in this brief little journey
On over the isthmus, down into the tide,
We give him a fish instead of a serpent,
Ere folding the hands to be and abide
Forever and aye in dust at his side?

Is it worthwhile that we battle to humble
Some poor fellow soldier down into the dust?
God pity us all! Time eftsoon will tumble
All of us together, like leaves in a gust,
Humbled indeed down into the dust.

-- Joaquin Miller

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03 -- GOD'S WRECKING CREW

Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Gal. 6:1 (R. V.)

Did you ever get into a railroad smash-up, glad to escape with whole limbs, glad to be of some assistance to the wounded and dying, counting not the several hours delay, lost connections, and a late arrival at destination-fully realizing how much better it is to give than receive? Did you ever watch the "wrecking train," her crew, a complement of doctors and nurses, with bandages, medicines, cots, etc., as they roll up, unload and get to work, splinting limbs, staunching the flow of blood, trepanning for concussion, making the sufferers comfortable on stretchers, shrouding the dead, lulling the intolerable pain of the tortured? As soon as you could be spared from your post of assistance, did you ever stand and admire those strong, brave railroad fellows, as they swing the mammoth derrick, lifting whole cars, loading them on the "wrecker"? The track is soon clear, travel is restored, traffic goes forward, and we, with our baggage, friends, wounded and dead, are on our way. Great is the wrecking crew.

Do you know, I think the church is somewhat like that. Did you ever see a stranded ship? Not long since, I went by boat from Apalachicola, Fla., across to Enterprise. We passed the entire length of St. George Island. The captain kindly pointed out the place where so many vessels of all sizes were beached a few months ago, when all our southern coast was storm swept. The process of getting a vessel afloat is very tedious and very difficult. Frequently, they must dig a great channel and let the water under her hull. In other words, take the sea to her, in order to get her to the sea. Do you know -- I think that is like our church work?

Were you ever on our great Mississippi, or her tributaries. after an overflow? Several times I have watched rescuing parties, in bateaux, on rafts, in boats, taking families, with their household goods and live stock from Vile flooded districts to points of safety. It is sadly interesting to see this, and then to watch them return to their devastated houses and yards, and rebuild and replant.

Do you know that is like church work to me? Several times I have visited cyclone-swept towns and districts. It is pathetic to see the farmer, after burying part of his dead, return to a wifeless home, a roofless house, a fenceless farm, and begin to rebuild. I have seen families sitting on the pile of timber which once constituted a beautiful city cottage; have seen all or part of the family standing on a bare lot -- all that was left of home. At such times, "friends in need are friends indeed." How tender our hearts grow! How our eyes drop sympathy! How our hands hunt helpful places to lay hold! How faithful fingers find the fluttering pulse and the fevered brow! How suddenly we remember a spare room at home, some extra furniture, some "good-as-new" unworn clothes, and that we have dollars ahead in bank, which we will not need for a month!

Do you know, I think that is like the church? Paul belonged to the church, prayed for the church, preached for and wrote to the church, lived in and died a member of and for the church. He was church property. In this day, the people act as if they own the church, preacher and all. In fact, they do. Of all cowardly, layman-pecked creatures, it is some preachers I meet. They must consult the board -- such a board! It is generally reduced to one man, and he can cuss but never prays! He can pay a little, can keep down reforms, vote against a revival, and boss. His family usually have front seats at theaters, are expert carders, and belong to the low-neck short-sleeve, gang, as a rule. "Must consult my Session." "Can't say, till I see my deacons." I have heard their answer, until I can beat that, for I know what their answer will be. Paul didn't belong, brethren, to that sort of a church, or didn't belong to it that way.

If I were to ask you Methodists what is an apostolic church, in your opinion, I'd see or hear in your definition your reference to the "General Rules." This is a great code, too. One of those rules, which is our distinguishing feature, says we must hold family and private prayer. All Methodists, therefore, who have a family, have a family altar. Without it you may be a Baptist or a Campbellite in our church, or a mugwump of some sort, but a Methodist you are not. Don't forget that.

If I were to ask you Baptists to define an apostolic church, you would have to draw your "Articles of Faith." One of these, you don't exhibit except very semi-occasionally, and ninety per cent of your members never heard of it. It runs something like this: "We believe in the everlasting love of God to His people; in the election of a certain and definite number of the human race to grace and glory, and this number is so certain and definite that it can neither be added to nor all diminished, and this is true of both angels and men."

I think it is your seventh article which runs after this sort. "All those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, will be effectually called, regenerated and so kept, that each of them will persevere in grace, and not one of them be finally lost -- and this is true of both angels and men."

If you should ask Paul if they had such Methodist hypocrisy, or Baptist doctrine in his day -- I think he would greet you with a "NO" a mile long, and with force enough to heave a mountain.

When we take doctrine, method of administration and all, I doubt if we have anything which resembles the apostolic. The church Paul belonged to was an army.

Let's study the church in this familiar figure. The army is levied and mustered in for purposes of offense and defense, or to fight, if you please. The blue coat, brass buttons, drum and flag, the drills, musters and maneuvers are not the object for which the army was raised. These are only paraphernalia, and incidentals. The real object is to give the life of one, or millions, if need be, for victory.

In a well-equipped army, you will find a commander-in-chief and the sub-officers, grading down to the rank and file. The time and plan of campaign lies with the chief and with his staff, as he may consult them.

Jesus Christ is the great Commander. Under Him, the pastor is the commander-in-chief. Jesus Christ called him and commissioned him, and He is in closer touch (or is supposed to be) with the great head of the army, than any other officer, or the men. In an army, if one colonel refuses to take his regiment in, a captain insists on taking a furlough now and fighting in the future, and a battalion or two refuse to obey orders, because of the hour, the ground, or their preference for using some other weapon -- what general could, with such a force, prosecute a successful campaign?

Yet this is just what our pastors are trying to do. They can't command one soldier in five hundred, or one dollar in a million. Jesus did not leave the world's evangelization in the hands of boards, leagues and unions, but in the hands of fire baptized pastors and evangelists. Yet if they preach against the dance, for instance, or anything which they consider inimical to the highest success of the campaign, nine-tenths of the army is insubordinate at once. They tell the pastor I won't do this, or I will do that, showing they are camp-followers and not fighters. If every enlisted man and woman who has society itch and other worldly ailments, had to go into a detention camp, or hospital, the pastor, in places, would not have enough left for picket duty.

An ideal church would be one whose every member attends upon all the preaching services possible, goes regularly to prayer-meeting, and will pray in public, testify to the saving grace of God in their own heart, or to a great hunger for it. Each adult, each child, each pauper should be trained to give. In short, each pastor should have in his church, a bee-hive, without a drone. This would work him very hard, in fact work him to death in a short while, but he is no better than his Master, and the members are no better than he.

Under the figure of an army, are you an apostolic church member? A scriptural church is set forth as a vine, with its branches and fruit. We are told that the juice of the grape root, that of the vine, the branches and the fruit are the same. The root supports the vine, the vine the branch, and the branches produce the fruit.

Our Lord said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." He also says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." We learn from this that Christ supports and sustains the church, His branches, that they may bear fruit. Grapes do not grow on the vine, but on the branches. The branches reach back to the vine for life and health and a plan of life -- then the air, sunshine and showers, apply their magic, and soon fulfill their purpose in the vine, and their mission in life, by hanging out the rich, juicy clusters. By abiding, in the vine side. and by manipulation on the element side -- we have the result -- fruit. In the 8th verse of the 15th chapter of John, Jesus tells us how we may glorify Him, viz., by bearing much fruit, and says we bear much fruit by abiding in the vine. In the vine world, a vital, healthy connection with a healthy vine is the prime, if not the sole condition -- of a fruitful branch. Fruit is an easy, a natural, may I say it, an inevitable result of this vital, continuous touch: -- severed, then barren and dead -- connected, then life and fruit.

As this vital connection of the branch with the vine will inevitably result in grapes, so, Jesus teaches, will our abiding in Him, bring forth fruit. Fruit, in the vine world, is grapes. Fruit in the church world, is sinners transformed from followers after worldliness into members of the vine, or Christians.

The branch is a new growth, a vine product, with but one mission, one business -- viz., to bear fruit. How many church members are Christians? How many Christians are of genuine Christly nature? How many do you know, whose business, whose daily work -- with ease and naturalness and joy, is to transform the unsaved into the saved, the possible into the actual? If the branch will not produce fruit, we cut it off -- yea, the vine disowns it. If the result of barrenness is the same in the Christian life, then one need not break a command in order to be severed and burned, but just fail to save souls. May God wake us up. What is a branch worth, which clings to the vine, but bears no fruit? What is a member worth who draws an existence from the Christ, but brings nothing to Him?

The church is set forth under the figure of a house. A house is for occupancy -- it is to hold something -- is strictly for use. It is a creature of inter-relation. No part is independent of the others, and no part is useful, or so useful, as when joined wisely to the other. I once passed a house for nearly a year, which seemed complete, all except the doorsteps, which were substituted by a long plank. The thought of incompleteness would seize me when I saw it. The roof needs the walls, the floor needs the sills, the windows need the shutters, and in the South especially, the fly and mosquito screen. A house is not complete even when the carpenters give a turn-key a job. It must then be cleaned and fitted for occupancy, by many little touches. The house is not complete if infested with fleas and vermin. A work of cleaning and riddance is necessary. Then, since a house is made for occupancy, it is very incomplete without a tenant. Don't forget this. And since the family will need chairs, tables, beds, ornamentation, a house is unfinished, if unfurnished.

Have you been spiritualizing and applying? Then you see that a church -- yea a Christian, is a house of which Christ is the occupant that our bodies are temples for His indwelling. The thought is not only inspiringly beautiful, but is a great question mark, asking us if we really

belong to the church, under the figure of a well-built, well cleaned, well-furnished, Christ-inhabited building.

The church is defined again, by reference to the body, as a microcosm -- a little universe. Interrelationship, interdependence, interchange and co-operation is the thought. If one member suffers, they all do. If one member fails, they all lack. Have you found your place, in the body, honorable or humble, where Christ is the head of a well built, well cleaned, well furnished, Christ-inhabited building?

As the hand quickly and gladly obeys the suggestions and dictates of the head, so do we obey our head?

But I turn from these definitions, to a thought, possibly more germane. Can a great army become disorganized? Can a vine become fruitless? Can a house become infected, or dilapidated? Can a body become diseased?

If so, can a church member become sick, weak, useless? If so, what must be done? My text furnishes the sure and only remedy. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault (or any trespass), ye which are spiritual, restore such an one."

Life hates death; health hates disease; beauty hates deformity; perfection hates imperfection. All of the interactive laws of life are resuscitative and restorative -- not destructive. Water, as it roars, splashes, swirls, around some chasm, is committed, every drop, in its very nature, to the filling -- until the level sought, is attained.

Observe life in the vegetable kingdom. Have you not noticed how "nature" will even cover a scar, which some cruel blow. or ruthless axe has made? "The road workers" of the South, blaze their new roads by making gashes on the trees which border the highway. Every year or two they must be regashed, or "nature" will so effectually heal the wound, you can't discern the age of the road, if the way at all. How many lawsuits have been started, and how many have been settled, by the losing or finding of the hidden hacks on living trees, marking the boundaries of land ownership?

Come a step nearer in looking into this great law. Why do men prune trees in springtime? It is because, the minute you cut a branch, you arouse the quiet life of the whole vine or tree, in an attempt to make up for the lost members. Life, then is active sympathy, you see, always trying to heal or hide.

Take life in the animal kingdom, and you will be surprised to find that night is "nature's" workshop, and sleep is "nature's" loom, in which she is busily replacing worn-out tissue. The physicians all consult, yea defer, to Dr. "Nature." Their remedies, must be used in such a way and in such quantities as "Nature" says, or they are no good.

Let an arm be maimed or lost, and while the whole body may be weaker, that member whose mate is missing, will be stronger. The whole body, has through physical sympathy, contributed. Am I plain?

A number of years ago, in Atlanta, Ga., a young lady lost all of her beautiful hair. The case was pitiable and incurable until a young physician tried "skin-grafting" -- Then a new discovery in France. Cleansing and medicating the girl's head. he persuaded a dozen other girls to part with a few strands from their tresses, with enough skin to carry vitality. These he applied to the diseased parts. Each little bit of scalp grew a few times its own size, Thus she was so cured that you can detect no former trouble.

Here was sympathy, starting in the mind of the doctor and in the hearts of the healthy young ladies. This sympathy evoked sacrifice for their friend and the fault was corrected and health and beauty restored. Am I plain? Should there come a sore on your hand, your whole body would contribute some of its sound tissue and good blood. "Nature" would cast off the corrupt matter -- then, when healed, you would notice a distinct effort to hide the scar, if any.

If I have made out my ease and established a law of natural life, I have by that means urged a doctrine of spiritual life upon your consideration.

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04 -- HYPOCRITES

Did you ever see one? You hear much talk about "Hypocrites in the church." When you find one of these paragons, outside, prating about hypocrites, and giving that as a reason for not coming inside, nine times out of ten, he is lying. There are more hypocrites outside than inside. Proof? Well, what is one? Is it a man or woman who pretends to be one thing, while in reality another? Well, when u man quits, temporarily, cussing and goes to using nice language, in the presence of ladies, he claims to be a gentleman, but he ain't. When a man who gambles, quits, part of the time, and does honest work, he is thereby claiming to be honest, but he is not. When you have sacrificed your mother -- given purity on a Saturday night, then walk in Sunday morning and kiss her, you claim to be a worthy son and decent man, but you are more of a dog. See? If claiming to be what you ain't, or claiming not to be what you are, defines a hypocrite, are they church products only? Then, if they are below what you think an insider should be, where did they catch the disease, or contract the habit? I'll tell you. They run too long with you before we get our hand on them. I am talking here to these outside critics. You demand that every church shall come up to your standard -- forgetting, that THE CHURCH IS A

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05 -- PIANO MANUFACTORY.

It is not simply a piano, making sweet music in the parlor, under electric waves. You find savings and dust, and glue, and paint, etc., with dirty overalls and soiled hands. THAT'S A CHURCH,

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06 -- AN ARMY.

In a well regulated army, you find them mustering in raw recruits at one end, and mustering out the time limit veterans at the other.

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07 -- THAT'S A CHURCH -- A HOSPITAL

In one of these institutions for the sick and wounded, you find them taking in, on one side, the fresh cases of fever, the victims of the pistol, knife, or honest toil -- while on the other side they are writing health certificates to the convalescent. THAT'S A CHURCH.

At one end of our great system of education, you find the patient, sad-faced girl -- drilling the child's head, saying a-a-a b-b-b until letters float before her tired brain, and play leap frog across her vision by the hour, day and night. But -- way up the same line, they are holding commencement exercises and writing diplomas. THAT'S A CHURCH.

We don't brand them as hypocrites. I doubt if I ever took the hand of one for church membership. No sir. They are sincere, and aimed to go all the way, and many, yea most of them are grieved and surprised at their failure. Then what has happened to them? Our text suggests the trouble. They have been "OVERTAKEN."

When one starts for the kingdom, he starts from all that is disappointing and disastrous, and starts for all that is hopeful, helpful, holy happy and heavenly. It means everything. All his old life will oppose him. His faults and sins, when he disowns and leaves them, will persuade him. GET OUT AND FOLLOW.

Did you ever live in the country and own a half dozen dogs? Say a cur, a pointer, two rice, and three big hounds? Did you ever shut them up Sunday morning and start to church, and have them get out, nose around, strike your track and come bawling and yelping after you -- re-enforced at each farm house, until you found yourself chased by all the dogs in the country round about? If you will call these dogs sins you have an idea of what I mean. Overtaken. Here they come! Poor man! Here are cussing dogs, gambling dogs, stealing dogs, lying dogs, Sabbath breaking dogs, whore dogs, emotional dogs -- young dogs, old dogs, white dogs, black dogs, Bull dogs, Cur dogs, Setters, Pointers, Trailers, Terriers, Newfoundland, St. Bernards, Spitz. Poodles. Bloodhounds. What a pack!! How they cry!! How they fly!! God have mercy, they are on my track, and are coming, re-enforced by every acquaintance they have all headed for me! What shall I do?

Poor man! What can he do? Run? Yes. Climb? Yes. Call for help? Yes.

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08 -- YE THAT ARE SPIRITUAL

Who knows but you have come to the throne for this hour? Can you think of a more needy or more noble work, than to beat back these dogs, and restore this poor, tired, hunted victim of a former life, from which he seeks safety, in flight?

One of the Bible definitions of a church, is the family. Here we have community of interest, sympathy, aim. We keep each other's secrets and are each a part of all.

I was once talking with a man who had four brothers and a sister. With a ringing voice, he said, "Brother Joe went to Texas, and is doing well; Sister Mary is married, and is out there, too, getting on fine. Tom went to Kansas and has a fine ranch. Will is in Florida raising oranges and vegetables." He here stopped and looked down. I said, what is the fourth name? "Laurance," he said. "Where does he live?" "Down in Mississippi. Laurance, poor boy" (by this time I could scarcely hear his tearful voice) so low! so tender! "Poor Laurance! He has a great weakness; he is a burden to himself and a heartbreak to his mother." Leaning forward, he whispered, "He drinks."

Ah me, if church members kept secrets, boasted of each other's triumphs, paled and choked in each other's sorrows, the church would soon stand forth, an invincible army, which could defy Hell, if not storm it. WHOSE FAULT?

We hold revivals, and that is right. We have great ingatherings, and that is glorious. We take in children, young folks, middle-aged, and the very old. If we have lapses in business, in health -- everywhere else, we will have them here, if we disobey or allow disobeyed, the laws of spiritual continuity and growth. What is the remedy? Whose fault is it, that we lose one? "Ye that are spiritual," will answer it.

I once had a talk with a young man, who was kindly taking me out from the railroad to a country church. I drew from him a confession of two black and blackening sins, which, he said, had such a hold on him, that it was "useless to try to be good." I found, in further conversation, that when he was a very small boy, in a meeting, a young woman found him in the audience, spake sweetly to him of Jesus' love, led him to the altar and to Christ. He applied for membership in the church, at her solicitation, and was received the following Sabbath, with a large class. In a few days, his father, a wicked man, removed from that community. No one else took interest in him -- his membership lapsed -- his experience lapsed -- he lapsed. Who was to blame? "If a brother be overtaken, ye that are spiritual, restore him." You see this, don't you? I soon led him back to a waiting Savior and a joyous communion.

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09 -- WHOSE FAULT?

The first time that I was in Ocala, Fla., we had a great meeting, which among other things, added hundreds to the church. When I next visited the place, some of the old members said, some of my converts were not doing well. I didn't have far to look for the cause, and, holding my left hand up, back toward them, I said, "When the meeting started four years ago,

most of you were down on this little finger, the low limb. When I left here, you had climbed up until you were either on the top limb or on the next to it. We left this lower limb full of happy, new converts, looking up, and preparing to climb. I come back, and what do I see? You have all dropped off the top limb, the one next and next and next, and have taken position on your old roost, knocking my crowd off, and they are on the ground. Had you kept looking up and climbing, God would have added new limbs, my converts would have followed you, and not one lapse would we have had, of necessity. They started to climb to the top, and with proper help would have reached it."

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10 -- A BABY IN THE HOUSE

Everybody wants to see it, kiss it, doctor it, play with it, and do something for it. Young converts are babes in Christ. The older ones are God's fathers and mothers, to care for them. They are as susceptible, teachable, helpable, spoilable, ruinable as the little ones, dropped into our arms. Did you know that?

A child wants attention -- loves to be noticed, must be, will be by something, or somebody. You must play with them -- work with them-study with them go to their level, if you would help them.

A child grows hard without sympathy and society. A child, too, will soon take to work, or study, if you give them something they can do; or can see something in. How like our young converts all this is! Most of them become discouraged and backslide, because they don't know. I remember well, the older members came and coldly shook my hand when I joined, but they let me alone, and I didn't know how to resist, how to fight to advantage, how to study the Bible, how to grow in grace, or how to find work, or do it, after it was found. I was very sociable, very approachable, very ignorant, very anxious to learn, very conscientious, very awkward, very timid -- very anxious to grow in grace, very sure I was called to definite religious work, but very ignorant of what it was, or how to find out. Yet nobody saw the cloud, heard the thunder, felt the lightning scorch, or got pelted with hail or got drenched by the rain from the storm which swept my soul for weeks. Did anybody know? Did anybody care? Would they know my feelings, if I should talk to them? Would they laugh at me, or would they call me mad? Did anybody ever lie awake at night, over real and possible sins? Have I been converted, anyhow? Could God use one so ignorant in His service? These and scores of such questions, all full of hope, doubt, fear, swept over my poor heart, like a devastating storm, which does much damage, but, re-enforced by other clouds and wind and thunder, turns back and empties its volleys and its vaults, with a yet more relentless fury, upon it's shuddering, unsheltered victim. O, is this the way? Can I be right? Did anybody close ever start out with just, such surroundings-even one -- and if so, is he dead or alive, in Heaven or Hell?

Why did not somebody find me in this night -- this night of uncertainty and winter of despair?

Listen at those dogs I thought I had chained! They are out and are coming, a thousand strong, and hungry, in full cry!! Will day never come? Is there no friendly hand to save? Would those saints whose light I see -- would they shelter me in the warmth of established experience?

O, for a friend! I've said many a time, "No man careth for my soul!" They didn't, either.

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11 -- A DOG KILLER

It has been the joy of my life to help these poor frightened dog hunted victims. They ran, but they zig-zagged, and wavered, and stumbled, and doubled on their own tracks, and ran in a circle, and in contrary directions, and no wonder if they did make friends with their hunting enemies and fondle them and feed them ms of yore.

A young man said to me, "Mr. Culpepper, I can't be good -- I have vowed several times to quit cussing, but I got mad today and swore hard again -- I'm discouraged and am going to quit. I knew how he felt in a minute. I remembered the day that cussing dog overtook me, when I thought I was rid of him forever. So I shot down his cussing cur, and turned to that bright young man, and said -- there lies the big dog. A few flee may slink along on your track for a while, but you'll make it, and he did, and he is a good preacher today.

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12 -- DO IT O' PURPOSE

Know these young converts -- especially the weak ones, but above all look after those who have been pursued by a fault. Why don't our preachers have lists of all the members, especially the new ones in all the homes? Why don't they have "get-acquainted" gatherings? Why don't they have wrecking crews? Why do we Methodists have so many "lost sight ofs"? So many "lettered outs"? Why do we have so many out of our Sunday-schools? Who is to blame for all of this loss? "Ye which are spiritual," might answer it.

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13 -- ANY OLD THING

Any old thing, if it is sincere if it is from the heart, counts in holding and helping folks.

The old Irish woman was taken, in a starving condition, from a congested district in New York, to the country, fed, clothed, given work on a farm. Her rescuer found her back in New York, and said, "You back, and why?" "Stumps don't talk," she said. That was her way of saying, to be lonesome, is worse than to be hungry. We want to talk, and out of the "abundance off the heart," too. A hand shake, recognition on the street, an introduction to a friend, a visit to your home, or theirs any old thing, God can use it if it is your best, and is intended for Him and for His pursued children.

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14 -- MIXING GRACE AND SYMPATHY

The preacher, or layman who mixes in with all that concerns their beginners will be a Godsend in many a crisis, through which all are sure to pass. Especially is this true, when there is a felt want, a burdensome defect. Children, poor people, uneducated folks, with many others feel this, and need some one who doesn't seem to know it or see it -- at least it is of little moment, "because they are not ashamed of me?" But a thousand times more important is this when one has started to heaven and lost their way.

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15 -- SWAPPING SELVES

I remember, once, on a Georgia circuit, just when I was trying to dive deeper into, and better comprehend, with all saints, the length, breadth and height of the love of Christ, I made a call on a very fine family, who had a closet, with a skeleton in it, instead of a parlor. The wife's face was done up in lily white of cheek, and eyes of pink, the year round. The husband, of a good South Carolina family, had a whiskey habit, which he had despaired of overcoming. As soon as church matters were introduced, he told me of it in a very frank manner, and said, "scratch my name off the book." His wife, walking across the floor, stopped and looked around and straight into my eyes. I said, "Did you scratch into the church?" "No." "Then you shan't scratch out." It would have done you good to see the beam of hope in that woman's eyes. He went with me; we talked and talked and talked, but not much about church. When we got back to his house next day, we were interested in each other. He slipped upon the ice of his old habit again, but it, somehow did not shake me. I had said, "If the good God wilt furnish the grace, I'll put up the sympathy and we will go cahoot on this fellow." I had made several visits, on my monthly rounds to that church. When, one day, I was led to take a tong walk among some little pines and gullies. I found a mighty good place down there to pray. Any preacher knows what I mean. Trying to get a better grip on the situation, I found myself swapping off and not being a preacher at all, but that fellow! I gave my wife the name of that man's wife. I called my children by the name of that fellow's children, until I and mine were blotted out or traded off. Then I lay, a doomed whiskey victim, my sweet wife, my precious children, listening to the wolf of hunger, to my drunken babblings, instead of prayer and patriarchal fireside talk, a pallor of despair in place of hope; neighbors staying away just because of our poverty and their inability to help. I got under the situation for once. Brethren, I prayed that morning. It was as if I had been down with typhoid fever, or fought fire two days and nights, or nursed a large family through an epidemic of smallpox, with the quarantine lid on. Yes, but SOMETHING HAPPENED as sure as you are born. I went back to the house, as weak as if I had been on the operating table for the removal of a bloated appendix. It wasn't that, exactly, but it was, too. The appendix of a blaring, bloating, blasting whisky shame and thirst had been cut out, and I was weak but well. I had taken something better than the Keely cure, and was home again.

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16 -- I TELL YOU, SOMETHING HAPPENED

It was over in a country where Jews raised hogs for gentile markets. Don't remember when or how I got there. Love, natural, serviceable, helpful love for my wife and children was gone, until a friend came along, and one of them spoke kindly to me, and I was a new man -- but my old self, and I went home.

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17 -- THE OUTCOME OF IT ALL

That man was converted and made, and is, a local preacher. He had five sons, the youngest being very young, but all were converted, and are today educated Methodist preachers. Six preachers, you see, dug up out of one old Georgia gully. Now I know that happened, for I was at the digging. The full and final outcome of it all will never be known until the full income is read from the books up yonder, but I shall look for an army, at least five hundred thousand strong. Glory to God!

On my third Georgia circuit, in our first church conference, at _____ church, I found the name of Bro. E. left on last year's "criminal docket." Upon inquiry, I found he had been "cited to trial" for repeated drunks -- that the Monkeys and Snakes had often raided him.

My predecessor had appointed a committee, who had neglected to act, until one "sheriff sale day" in S., the chairman of said committee, himself got "boozy," and felt pious, and undertook, on their way to their country home, to lecture Bro. E., being so drunk himself, that Bro. E. slipped a bottle from his, the committeeman's pocket, and got on another rip-roaring drunk, and swore he'd "whip the next preacher or church member, who fooled with him." Here the "court rested," and here I found it. I asked if there was any one present who was not mixed up with the former trial. "Yes -- Leven T. here, who has just Moved in from Burke County." I asked that we two be requested to act, and have a talk with Bro. E. My main thought, at the time, was to "restore" him, not to "church" him.

I took dinner with Bro. S. and, after prayer, we hitched up and drove over to R. where Bro. E. lived. He was out on his lot, near the road, frown where Bro. S. called him, saying as he approached Bro. E., "This is our new pastor. We are getting acquainted."

"Yes," he said, with a close took at me, "I said I'd whip the next preacher who came fooling ground me -- I'm as good as half the preachers and as good as any of the members in New Hope, and a lot better than most of them." Breathing a prayer, and remembering our mission -- TO RESTORE HIM, I tried to "consider myself lest I also be tempted," and made my first pass at him, saying, "Bro. E. I am not here today, in an official capacity, but as Bro. S. told you, I want to know you and your family." He interrupted, saying, "O, well, you take my name off that book; if it hadn't been for my wife, I'd have quit the church tong ago." Remembering that we were out to restore, I "tacked ship" and said, "Are those your children over in the yard?" Glancing, he said, "Yes, seven of them."

"Who did you marry?" "Old man Tom Peter Smith's daughter, down that road about two miles." Is he an old man, very red face, and very beautiful, long white hair?" "Yes." "I saw him yesterday and he has promised to come and hear me preach. By the way, I find that a man by your name was recording secretary in N. H. church for many years was he your relative?" "That was my father, sir, and the best man God Almighty ever made." I thought his voice was slightly tremulous, and I noticed he put one foot on the hub of my buggy, and averted his face. Referring to the death of a female, I asked after her. She too, was of the highest type of a Christian, a mother or aunt. Bearing in mind that we had gone after a hound pursued brother, and that we were out to restore such an one, I said, "Bro. E. I'm getting up my book of 'Last Words,' or 'dying testimony.' Did your father talk much in his last illness?" Changing feet on the hub, he said, "Yes, the old man talked a great deal. I nursed him, and he died leaning back against me." He changed feet again, then re-changed them -- then changed back again. "Do you, remember your father's very last words?" Shifting uneasily, he said, "Yes, I'll never forget that. He said with mighty nigh his last breath" (changing feet), 'Wilks, my boy, I'm leaving you now Good-bye -- If you never make a dollar or have a friend, meet me in Heaven.' That's the last word he said." "I promised, and" (bursting into tears) "by the grace of God I'll do it, too."

I said, "Bro. E. would you mind telling old New Hope that? -- the church where that grand man lived and died?" "No; I'll tell them-when you want me to." Flashing days and appointments, I said, "next Friday." "I'll be there." I circulated "Preaching" for Friday, in January. We had a good house. After preaching I said, "Brethren, our good friend and brother Brother E. wants to speak to us. That was many years since, but I have never heard a more straight-forward, manly confession in my life. At the end of his penitent talk, he looked at old Aunt Nancy Smith -- a saint of God and said. "Aunt Nancy, I'm going to that altar, and I want you to come and get down and pray for me. You never did give me up, no-how." Motioning to a very tenderhearted man, Aunt Nancy's son-in-law, he said, "Lute, come here and get down on the other side; I don't care how often I went wrong, you always had a kind word for me. If anybody can pull me through, you two can."

Brethren, we had a whole campmeeting there during the next thirty minutes. They landed him so high that he didn't make a bobble for the next fifteen years. **THEY RESTORED HIM.**

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18 -- A POETIC PRAYER

Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
In living echoes of Thy tone;
As thou hast sought, so let me seek
Thy erring children, lost and lone.

O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet.
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet.

O strengthen me that while I stand
Firm on the Rock and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things Thou dost impart;
And wing my words that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.

O give Thine own sweet rest to me,
That I may speak with soothing power
A word in season, as from Thee,
To weary ones in needful hour.

O fill me with Thy fullness, Lord,
Until my very heart o'erflow
In kindling thought and glowing word--
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.

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19 -- GOD FLOATS A DANGER SIGNAL

Before I close, listen to these words of caution, "Considering thyself." Why these words? In what does danger consist? There is surely a reason for these weighty words. But how could I suffer, while helping others?

I may be tempted to quit. Maybe become discouraged before the wanderer is brought home. The work is hard, often expensive, nearly always unpopular,

I may be tempted to feel that the wanderer is so weak or worthless, that it is time and money thrown away. I hear this often. You may be tempted to let them go, because you or some one else has found them, healed them, retutored them often before, and they return like the sow that was washed.

You may be betrayed into the same spirit of discouragement and despair which possesses them. Who never listened to tales of heartbreaking sorrow, until they could hear no more, and until it looked as if, in this case, God had completely forgotten to temper the storm?

There is danger, lest you think that this poor wanderer has gone so far and sinned so deeply that God cannot, or will not bear longer, or bring them back again.

There is danger, lest your work become professional, or mechanical and you have not the Spirit, while you do work for the Holy Spirit. You are in danger, if successful, of thinking you

are an expert -- that you are very necessary to the running of the Kingdom. This will be fatal to your own spiritual advancement.

You may be tempted to choose your own way of doing the work, without getting the mind of the Spirit, as to its nature or extent. For instance, some jump to the conclusion that they are to do their work by proxy, paying, for instance. Others do their part by praying, but plead poverty, business engagements, inability to talk, timidity -- anything out of the line of their preconceived notions.

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20 -- ONCE MORE

As the children of Israel had formed marital and business ties, doubtless, many of them were satisfied to remain in Egypt and offered arguments more or less plausible -- so you will find men and women who have succumbed and settled down, become satisfied and are often enamored of this worldly or wicked life. They can talk too. If it is business, they will show you the spots. If it's pleasure, they will show you the innocence, intrinsic value, on the spirits, and if you don't mind, they will convince you, and if they don't persuade you to spend the night with them, they will detain you, till darkness overtakes you, ere you reach home.

But doctors and nurses have to be careful. Men who go into "death damp" cellars and wells, must be careful. Men who handle poisons and mix chemicals, must take heed. Women who cross social and color lines for various, but worthy reasons, must consider themselves. It is enough to know that there is danger, to yourself -- the parties you are trying to help, and to all concerned.

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21 -- THE SECRET OF LIFE

The secret of life -- it is giving;
To minister and to serve.
Love's law binds the man to the angel,
And ruin befalls if we swerve.
There are breadths of celestial horizons
Overhanging the commonest way;
The clod and the star share the glory,
And to breathe is an ecstasy.

Life dawns on us, wakes us, by glimpses
In Heaven there is opened a door!
That flash lit up vistas eternal;
The dead are the living once more!
To illumine the scroll of creation,
One swift, sudden vision sufficed;

Every riddle of life worth the reading
Has found its Interpreter -- Christ.

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THE END