You got what you worked for, Phil thought, straightening things in the drawers of his desk. After years of being a student, he’d become a teacher. It was his second year, to be exact.

This meant that he was now seeing things from the other side of the "fence," rather, the desk. The view, if things continued as they were when he started, was proving interesting and more than just a little surprising, he admitted candidly. Sometimes it was startling, and that was putting it mildly.
Straightening the papers on top of his desk and putting errant paper clips in their proper place inside a drawer, Phil glanced through the windows to the outside, wondering what the new day held in store for him.

What had happened to the youth of America? he wondered, standing statue-like in front of his desk while memories of his upbringing and his past marched, soldier-like in rank and form, before him.

He had been one of eight children, reared in rural America and come up the proverbial "hard way," which wasn't hard at all, he thought, recalling the myriad of times of corn popping, chestnut roasting and taffy making. Not by just one single member of the family, but by all! The entire bunch of Craddocks took part.

Born and reared by rugged, honest, hard-working, Godfearing and God-honoring parents, whose sole dependence was in God and upon the land they tilled and worked and toiled over, he could remember some "lean" years, to be sure. But always they had managed to live through the coldest winter and emerge, come spring, like the tender crocus and daffodil, wearing smiles of gratitude and thanks to God for the blessing and privilege of once more tilling the soil and working the ground; the process of sowing and reaping, planting and gathering, starting all over again. All with thankfulness and no complaint.

Growing up, back there andthen, netted rich compensations and rewards. Not in dollar signs and materialism, but in the making of men and women. Yes, the making and molding and shaping of men and women who believed in and trusted solely on God. He was their source of abundance . . . or not-so-much-abundance.

His choosing and giving, and His Divine wisdom, was always deemed wisest and best. There was no dependence on the state, or on welfare. (Horrors! Perish the thought even!) One simply prayed all summer long, that the Lord of harvest would give sufficient food for the winter and that sicknesses would be few and minimal. If adverse circumstances came, which they often did, one sat quietly and calmly by, taking it in as the will of God for his life and praying for a deepening in the grace of God, should this be the intent and purpose of the Almighty in having withholden the things for which He had been asked.
How well he recalled his Aunt Flossie, almost 91, sitting alone in her neat little house on a cold January day, in constant pain from a toe that had been half eaten away by carbolic acid--spilled on it--when she was a child. But Aunt Flossie wouldn't go to the hospital, because she was broke and wouldn't be "beholden to the state," so she sat there in that rocking chair all winter long, as snow drifts grew deeper and deeper around the house, rocking furiously trying to forget the pain.

Aunt Chloe, also, had cancer but wouldn't tell a soul till the day she had to be taken to the hospital. She went into a coma and died within a week after she arrived there. Yes, he had relation with pioneer blood, running thick in their veins, he thought. Pioneer blood, and an undying faith in God and His past-finding-out ways.

Take the youth today: Born after World War II (many of them) they felt--or knew nothing--of the old farmers' urgency over the bounty of the crops or the height of the woodpile in October, he thought, feeling a sadness of such depth wash over him as to make him weep.

And why should they feel any such urgency, he asked himself, with the government paying farmers not to grow crops, and with Food Stamps available to low-income families?

Now, the old urgency of getting and having enough to eat had been replaced by other urgencies in a society far more affluent than 40-50 years ago. And far more dissatisfied, too, the young man realized with a stab of sharp pain.

He had become acutely aware of the insidious and subtle changes the years had made in his subjects . . . those whom he taught; or he should say, whom he was trying to teach. The first hint of resentment, or rebellion, or both, was felt last fall a year ago. He had only been teaching five or six weeks, and that the first year of his teaching. Fired up with a burning desire and passion to impart to his students what had been imparted to him by his teachers and his noble Godfearing ancestors, Phil had begun an introduction into the lives of some of the great poets: Their writings and the lofty, noble causes behind the writings, a thing he had had in his English classes as a young man in high school, and loved.
The class, on that very first day, was a total disaster. "Who has time to read this guy's intricate prose?" one student complained. "And who cares what he wrote?" he added vehemently. "Yeah," another grumbled, "this guy that lived out in the woods, how could he ever know where it's at?"

Phil sighed, recalling the event. The students were bored. Plainly and decidedly, turned off: The great poets were anti-social to them. They used extensive vocabularies; they lived more than a hundred years ago.

"The things that happened a hundred years ago," one boy had queried angrily, "why are you filling us up with this stuff? How is it relevant to what's happening today?"

Perhaps the close bond he'd felt to, or with, the poets, had been the fact that he, like many of them, had grown up in the country and experienced many of the same feelings and deprivations they experienced. And though he had done his best to answer the students' pointed questions, his good, sound answers were not enough. Try as he may, Phil discovered that he couldn't alter the apparent hostility toward history, nor the apparent hostility toward "passive nature boys," as the students dubbed the poets.

At the end of the day, he had found himself in a total state of culture shock. He was afraid: What kind of America was this any more? What had happened? These young men and young women, many who had grown up in or on the very edge of the fields and forests, what had happened to them that they had little or no use for history and nature and English? In a daze, he went up to the principal's office and sat in a chair across from the older man's desk.

"You look forlorn," Ed Downey noted.

"I am," Phil agreed. "Here I am, teaching young people from my own area, where I've lived for 26 years, and I don't understand them at all. How can we be so different?"

Ed toyed with a pen on his desk for a moment, then he said, "You both have very different ideals. We're living on the edge of an urban society. Yes, I said urban society. Right here in this beautiful and picturesque little town of ours. And in the young, an urban society fosters urban ideals."
"While you and I are thinking of God and church and forests and flowers and crunching leaves, these kids are dreaming of stereos and fast cars. For them, the ideal is to act out their feelings, to have action grow out of thought. You and I were taught as kids to suppress wrong actions and feelings. Our parents saw to it if we didn't! Not these kids! It's most difficult for them to appreciate thought for its own sake."

I leaned forward in my chair. "Do you realize what you just said?" I asked quickly. "Why, Ed, it's dangerous; this thing of acting out their feelings, and having action grow out of thought. This is like dynamite. It's explosive. With scarcely any of them knowing anything whatever about experiential salvation and true holiness, this is dangerous! What happened to the old-time preachers who nearly scared the boots off us with their hell, fire and brimstone preaching? Where are they? We need them. Need them, I repeat. And godly teachers, too!"

Ed sighed deeply. "There's the trouble, Phil," he replied sadly, "You hit the nail on the head: Where are the godly preachers? And the God-like school teachers? The educators have taught for so long that there are no absolutes until the kids believe it. The public education system, I'm sorry to say, has subtly deprecated the need for self-discipline. God says adultery and fornication are wrong--sinful. You and I know this to be so. God says lying is wrong--sinful. Again, you and I know this. Not most of these kids. They have been taught there are no absolutes--that everything is relative. This has been the philosophy of existentialism so powerfully taught by Sartre and Camus in the past generation.

"The impact of the absence of absolutes is staggering, Phil. Frightening. And, sad to say, it has spilled over into our own little town. We got rid of the man when we realized what he was teaching. But it's here, none the less. And, I guess I'll have to admit that television has done as much as anything to make the kids feel this way."

Both Phil and the principal were silent for a long time. Then Ed spoke again. "Know what's wrong with us, Phil?" he asked sadly. "We're spoiled. We know a better way. We were brought up differently."

"Brought up right!" Phil stated emphatically, leaving the office.
He had gone home that night, but not to rest. The principal's remark about absolutes and about the students finding it difficult to appreciate thought for its own sake, nagged his brain and troubled his heart. There was passiveness in the students, to be sure, but it was not the kind of passiveness that would ever let them suffer as his Aunt Chloe had done, so patiently and calmly, till her summons came from on High; nor as Aunt Flossie had suffered through a winter of physical pain. Their passiveness and restlessness, he realized suddenly with pain, grew out of desperate confusion; a desperate search for reality, for meaning; for "absolutes" . . . things "that mattered"; things that had concrete consequences.

Over and over, he had heard the words, "I just don't care. I just don't care. I just don't care! I don't care if I pass English. I don't care if I flunk out of school."

It had sounded like a broken record to Phil, until he realized, one day, that it was a statement {of many} with a reverse meaning. Then he began to sit up and take notice and look for ways to help those whose desperate cry had only been, "I don't care!" In all too many cases, it was the student's way of saying, "I want to care, very much, but I'm just not sure if this is really important. I'm not quite sure why I should care. I'm not even certain that I have anything to care for. Nobody cares about me; so why should I care? I go when I want to, come home when I please, do what I want to do. See what I mean? No body cares!"

The full weight of his responsibility . . . his duty and moral and spiritual obligation to a "now generation" . . . overwhelmed the young teacher with tremendous impact and force. He was sure he knew the reason now for God's checking him when he thought so seriously of resigning at the close of his first year of teaching. There was work to be done in "Jerusalem"; his home area. And what work! The fields were truly "white unto harvest."

He sat in the chair behind his desk now and wept. Great, silent tears they were. Television had indeed done its dirty work, he thought, in altering and changing the lives of millions; his students included. Watching it, they had neither time for study nor thought: Deep, intelligent, and soul-searching thoughts. It was a robber and a thief, depriving his young charges of the myriad ideal-building, manmaking character and thoughts he'd developed and enjoyed from childhood up.
It seemed unfair . . . grossly unfair . . . that the present affluent society, with its "work-saving, timesaving" gadgets and quick-food operations, its colored televisions and mini-car washes, should be depriving and robbing the youth of all that was once good and noble and character building, Phil thought with a groan.

What could he do . . . where could he begin . . . he wondered, to bring his students back to the kind of training and teaching he had had? It would require a totally new concept of thinking for them, he realized. But was this impossible? he asked himself probingly. With God, all things were possible. And hadn't he begun to see a faint ray of hope... a glimmer of fight in this direction . . . in several of the students recently?

A warmth enveloped Phil. He knew he had the answer to his probing question: Like the gardener, he would "fertilize the trees this year, also," and trust God to give the results.

Hearing the laughter of students in the hallway now, he wiped the tears away, opened his Bible and stood, waiting to begin the day's classes. "Line upon fine; precept upon precept," he quoted softly as the first student came through the door.