A NEW "HEAD"

by Mrs. Paul E. King

Gordon opened his eyes, still half-dazed and not fully awake, wondering why the house was so silent and still. Then he eased forward in the comfortable chair and, with the changed body position, the easy-chair which moments before had been a recliner was suddenly in its upright position.
He brushed a shock of unruly red-brown hair back from his forehead and rubbed his eyes, remembering. Again a pang of jealousy shot its poison arrow into his heart as anger churned deep within. What a fine Father's Day, he thought bitterly. Yes, what a fine Father's Day!

He got to his feet and padded into the kitchen in slippered feet. Pouring a cup of coffee, he added cream and checked the wall clock for time. Eleven o'clock. At least another hour and a half, or two, till his wife and three children would be home from church.

Setting the cup on the kitchen table, Gordon sipped the coffee while angry thoughts seeped like poison from his heart into his being. Until Muriel and his children had gotten saved, as they had called the thing that had changed their lives so totally and radically, they had been a closely-knit, almost inseparable family when he was not at work. Not anymore! Always, there was the Sunday morning Sunday School and worship service which, come rain or shine, his wife and their three children attended. As if that wasn't enough, they never missed the Sunday night services either.

"Crazy! Plumb crazy!" he exclaimed aloud, banging the teaspoon down on the table. "Sundays aren't fun anymore," he added in disgust, recalling the many times he and Jeff and his daughters had gone fishing on Clear Lake on a warm Sunday morning.

"Hey, why not?" he asked aloud, snapping his fingers together. "That's what I'll do -- go fishing. If they're too busy 'churching,' I'll go by myself," and he gulped the coffee down.

Scrawling a hasty "Gone fishing" on a note pad, he put it beside his empty cup then hurried into his fishing garb, taking along a hastily prepared lunch. If no one would go along with him on his one really free day he would make it a one-man thing, he decided, even though it wouldn't be half as much fun as when the children accompanied him. He would miss the excited chatter and giggles and the large, expressive eyes of amazement and pride as each hauled in his or her own catch. But not another Sunday would he waste by sitting at home alone, waiting and hoping they'd change their mind. No sir!

Once in the boat, he started the motor and sped across the clear blue water, shimmering like a crystal gem in the golden sunlight, toward the place
where he had had his last big catch... about four hundred feet from the little white-shuttered cottage on the opposite shore and in direct line with a stately pine. That was his "marker."

Gordon cut the motor and dropped both anchors; then he baited his hook and sat down on the seat to watch the bobber as it floated lightly on the surface of the lake. For a brief moment he forgot about his wife and the children. Then a child's excited scream of delight over having caught a fish floated to his ears. Turning, he saw a father and mother and two children in a boat some distance away. That squeal of delight could have been one of his offspring, so familiar did it sound, he thought, feeling deprived and "left out."

Bitter thoughts lapped his heart in perfect rhythm to the "slap, slap, slap" of the water against the boat. If Jeff and Kristin hadn't gone to that Vacation Bible School thing they'd all still be a "together family." But Muriel had told them, "Sure, you may go." And since that time everything in his home had changed. Muriel had gone to the program, or whatever it was called, to hear Jeff and Kristin recite their Bible verses and to see what they had made, and when she came home she was all troubled and teary-eyed, saying that there "was something" to what Jeff and Kristin said they had found. Or got. Or received. Or whatever it was they had said.

Gordon remembered having put his arms around his wife and telling her that children were emotional beings and whatever they were so ecstatic over would soon be put away and forgotten like an old toy. But such was not the case; Jeff and Kristin, joined now by their youngest sister Jennie, begged to go to Sunday School and church. Muriel, feeling it was her responsibility to take the children instead of sending them, accompanied them to church. She was "saved" on her second trip there.

Gordon watched the bobber, recalling the shine and the glow on his wife's face when she came home and told him about the joy of sins forgiven and the inner peace of her soul. Jeff had added, man-like, "Now all we need to be a really perfect family is for you to get saved, Dad."

That had cut. Stung him, too. As though he were not a good enough father! Sure, there were some areas in which he could improve. He realized this. But he had always prided himself in his ability to be a good father. Then when Muriel had gently asked him to come to church with her, well, it was
almost as if she thought he needed a change too. He didn't drink nor did he smoke; so why should she feel this way?

The bobber wavered ever so slightly. Little fish, nibblers, he realized, his mind still more on the change in his family and their new life-style than on the fishing. Muriel was different. He had to admit this. Truth of the matter was that she was a better-than-ever-before wife and mother. She was "beautifully" different. Yes, there was a change in her. A radical change. And in the children, too. His children. There was kindness and love and respect between them since whatever it was that took place in their heart. Yes, he had to admit this too. It was an indisputable fact. He had the day by day evidence of the change lived before him.

Gordon's mind wandered back to his boyhood and his parents. They had never spoken to him about God. Was this the reason he had never told his children anything about God? There was a carry-over, generally, a like-father-like-son sort of thing. Had his grandfather never spoken anything about God to any of his children, he wondered, feeling like God had somehow taken his place in his family's lives. He felt as if he was no longer the head of his own family; God was. At least Muriel and the children did everything to please and obey Him. And wasn't the husband to be the head of his family? he asked himself indignantly. Indeed so! Well. . . .

Bitter thoughts again boiled up inside him. Against Muriel. Against God. But mostly, against God. Gordon felt as if his wife's love for God was stronger than it was for him. "Or why else would she never miss church services?" he asked aloud. "And read her Bible and pray daily? She knows how much my Sundays meant to me. But no, God gets them all now. And Wednesday nights, too."

Then a sudden thought shot into his brain: just what had he ever done to prepare his children for what was beyond this life? What? And what, really, was beyond this earthly life? he wondered fearfully. Muriel was finding the answers to many of these perplexing questions. Better still, she and his children were prepared for what was after this life. He, and he alone, was unprepared. He, supposed to be the head of his house . . . the staunch leader . . . had done absolutely nothing toward his family's spiritual life. He had provided food, clothing and shelter for them, plus many extras . . . many luxuries . . . but the most important of all things he had neglected and shunned. They had "entered in"; he was left out. Not by any error or choice
on their part; it was all on his part. His decision. He had kept himself out. They had wanted him to become a part of their new life in Christ. Yes, they had. But he had refused.

The thought was almost staggering. But it was true; he had barricaded the door of communication and fellowship by remaining stubbornly adamant to their gentle entreaties and pleas for him to go to church with them. And, unlike what he had thought and supposed, his family's fervor and love for Christ was not waning and cooling off with time; if anything, it was deepening and becoming more intense, Maybe there was something to it after all. Some day he would look into it, maybe.

A loneliness such as he had never before experienced gripped him then. If they wouldn't change . . . and it was all too obvious that they wouldn't and they weren't . . . well, he did owe it to them to at least investigate a bit, to earn more about what they believed. Didn't he? Yes, as husband and father he did owe this to them.

Pulling the floating bobber and the line into the boat, Gordon next drew up the heavy anchors and, starting the boat, he headed for his waiting car. No time was better than the present for making an important investigation, he decided, Suppose Muriel and the children were right and he was wrong, then what?

Never one to shy away from admitting he was wrong, when and if he discovered he was, he decided with real manliness that this "investigation" should be no exception. How could he properly evaluate this thing when he had never so much as gone to one of the church services even to see what it was like? And just because his own parents had never been church-minded, was that reason enough for him to say that what Muriel and his children were doing by going to church was wrong?

Gordon gulped. Could this actually be God's way of drawing him to Himself? he wondered suddenly. True, he had had a deep uneasiness inside his being -- a sort of emptiness, a wondering, at times, just what life was all about. He felt there must be more to it than just his everyday normal routine. It was as though he was not complete, like he was unfilled, empty. On the inside, empty. And Muriel had told him that her soul was fully satisfied. In Christ. Yes, those were her exact words. Well, today he would investigate. He would find out for himself just what this was all about. And if he changed,
the way his wife and children had changed, the family would have a new "head." And who knew? Maybe Christ was supposed to be the "Head" of him. Yes, maybe this was the proper order of things. Today he would find out.

Suddenly Gordon felt happy, like he was doing the right thing. And in that instant his heart told him that Muriel's God would soon become his God. Yes, today even!

He docked the boat and hurried away, wanting to get to church before dismissal. This Father's Day was going to be his best ever. He knew it; yes, he knew it. His family deserved to have a righteous man as its head. No better time than the present to give them the gift of a Christian father and husband, he reasoned sensibly. And today, on this Father's Day, he would give them this gift.

He could hardly wait to get home and go to church.