THE SHOW-OFF
By Mrs. Paul E. King

It was one of those beautiful never-to-be-forgotten days in early spring. The sky was a pure robin-egg blue and the sun was shining from a cloudless sky. To add to the glory of the day, the Creator had sent a warm, balmy breeze as soft as a feather that fanned the bushes and rustled the new green leaves. It tousled our hair in a playful fashion, as we sat on our big three-sides-of-the-house porch, the fellows and I. It was a perfect day; another day which the Lord had made. I was rejoicing in it and I was glad.
"Well, fellows," I said, propping my feet up on the handrail that was a beautiful part of our lovely old porch, built around and gracing three sides of the house, "it looks like we're almost ready to get going."

"What do you mean, almost ready?" Ken questioned. "We're all here."

"And anxious to get started," Jim added, brushing a shock of unruly brown hair back in place on his head.

"Yes, let's get moving," Jay said. "I like to ride when it's not too hot. Today's the perfect day." And he started for his bicycle that stood upright and shiny-bright, fresh-washed, waxed, and shined, at the bottom of the porch steps.

"We have one missing," I remarked, counting the fellows. "Tad Twining's coming."

"You must be kidding!" Elwood Pence exclaimed. "Anybody but Tad, Tom!"

"I can't stand him!" Al declared. "He's the biggest and most repulsive show-off I ever saw. He's sickeningly sickening, for whatever that means, which in my dictionary . . . I mean, the dictionary according to A1 Winston . . . means, he's yuk!" There was an explosion of hilarious laughter.

"Please, fellows," I begged, "don't be so hard and unkind to Tad. We all profess to be Christians, and we say we love the Lord. Don't you think we need to exemplify and emulate the life of the One whom we profess to love and to serve?"

"But He didn't have to put up with an obnoxious showoff, Tom!" A1 replied quickly. "I'm sure our Lord would have put such an individual in his place in short order, if He had encountered him."

"I doubt that, Al," I said, softly. "Jesus was full of compassion. He was long-suffering and kind, too. Where would each of us have been had He not been patient with us?"
"Hey, I admire you, Tom," Elwood piped up, "and I respect you greatly. That's why I voted you in as our young people's leader. But Tad Twining! Oh Tom, how far must one's patience reach?"

"You only helped to vote Tom in," the fellows chorused. "Each of us had a vote too." And they laughed good humoredly.

"Sure, you did," Elwood admitted. "And I certainly didn't mean to give a false impression. I don't know why I stated it like I did. But back to Tad; you know he doesn't have many friends, Tom. Now, for sure, there's a reason for this. You're not blind. Can you say you enjoy his many show-off displays? It's disgusting, to put it mildly."

"There's a big difference between enjoying and having compassion and manifesting Christian love," I said kindly to Elwood. "One need not enjoy to manifest and display true Christian graces."

"Well, I'm afraid I can't pretend," came Elwood's instant and immediate reply.

"Not pretend, Elwood," I answered, "but, from the heart, display what Christ imparted to us at conversion and entire sanctification. This new life is not a pretended thing. In fact, it can only be displayed and lived if we are truly Christ's . . . body, soul, mind and spirit. Without the Lord in us, it is impossible to live as He lived."

"That's for sure" Jim exclaimed. "I, for one, have been too hard on Tad. Oh, not verbally, but in my heart. I will confess, though, that it's difficult for me to be around him for very long. He makes me feel sick in the pit of my stomach. I think each of us will have to admit that we much prefer being around someone who is just down-to-earth natural and completely unpretentious. Even you, Tom, will have to admit this."

"You're right, Jim; it is far more pleasant and nice to be in the company of someone who is not trying to be someone else, nor trying to put on an act or a show to get a bit of attention. But what, do you suppose, would Jesus have done? What would He do now, were He in our circumstance? Would He ostracize Tad and exclude him from gatherings? Would he, fellows?"
"I guess we all know the answer to that question," Jim answered soberly. "And I'm sure that more 'knee' work will give me the grace I need to be around him, for I honestly and truly do need grace around Tad. He's so obnoxious."

"Sickening!" Ken remarked. "And, no hard feelings whatever on my part, I'm going on. Like Jay, I enjoy the cool of the day. See you at the glen, OK?" And he jumped on his bike and pedaled away.

"See you, Tom," Jay said, swinging his long leg easily over the bar and following Ken.

One by one, the fellows rode away, until only Jim remained with me. "You may as well go, Jim," I said. "I'll wait on Tad. I don't know what's keeping him. I told him we wanted to get an early start."

"He's not the easiest fellow to get up in the morning, so I was told. He may still be in bed," Jim replied kindly.

"In that case, you may as well follow the others," I said, looking down the road for Tad.

"I hate to leave you here alone," Jim remarked. "My folks are inside," I said, laughing as I made the pun. "And really, Jim, I don't mind. I feel duty bound to wait, because I invited Tad to go with us. I appreciate your loyalty and devotion, however. Thanks, much. Enjoy yourself."

Jim cast a look of longing down the road, in the direction of the fastly-disappearing fellows. Then, straddling his bike, he said, "I'll see you later, Tom, God willing. Bye for now."

It was quiet on the big porch after the fellows all left; only the softly-sighing breeze through the trees and the singing birds broke the silence. I leaned back in the chair and closed my eyes, praying for Tad as I did so. He had a soul same as I did. And that soul, I knew, was going to live on somewhere in the eternities to come. Where would it be: heaven or hell?

I had a strong, compelling feeling that I was responsible as to where his soul would be after death; that I, with God's mighty and powerful help, could influence Tad to come to Christ and get saved and be ready for Heaven,
washed in the Blood of the Lamb and, subsequently, be cleansed from all inbred sin.

I waited. And waited. No Tad. When an hour had slipped by and still he had not arrived, I decided to ride out to where he lived and see what was wrong. With long, easy strides I crossed the porch, went down the few steps, and jumped on my bike.

The ride to Tad's house was always pleasant, and this morning it was even more so, with birds making a melody of such proportion and magnitude as to awaken even the heaviest sleeper, I felt. Gentle breezes wafted the spicy-sweet, heady fragrance of early blooming wild roses to my nostrils as I pedaled, and the sound of humming tractors turning sod, to my ears. It was a beautiful day. I reveled in the delightful sounds, sights, and smells. It was good to be alive, wonderful to be a Christian, and an honor and privilege to be a witness for Jesus.

The neighbor's horses whinnied and neighed for me as I passed by their neat fenced-in grazing lands, and a half-dozen or more wild ducks took to the air from a nearby pond as I hurried along. It was great to be alive and well and, better and greater still, to belong to God: body, soul, mind, and spirit.

I pulled into Tad's yard sometime later. Chickens scattered in all directions as I rode toward the yard with its neat white picket fence. I saw Tad on the porch before I had time to brake to a stop even.

"Hello!" I called loudly. "I missed you, Tad. You were supposed to go bike riding with us today, remember?"

Tad finished drinking the milk which he had, and ate the last bite of doughnut, then he said sadly, "You're the only one who really wanted me to go, Tom, and you know it. I just couldn't bring myself to do it: not when I know I'm not welcome. I'm sorry, but this is how I feel, Tom. You're great; you care about me. I sense this. And I honestly appreciate it. But the others . . . well . . ."

The unfinished sentence trailed above him. My heart went out to Tad. I wanted to help him; in fact, I longed to help him. But there was only one way to do so, and if I did what needed to be done I knew it would hurt him. Still,
what was a friend for? Wasn't it so that he could and would help, if necessary? Even if it hurt?

I bowed my head and prayed a silent but earnest prayer to God for help. Then, in a softly-kind way, I said, "Tad, do you have any idea why you aren't the most desirable company nor why you aren't too well liked by your peers?"

It came as a real blow to him, my question. The kindly-sent arrow hit its mark in the very center of his being. I not only felt and sensed it but I saw it as well; it was written all over Tad's face.

"Do you?" I probed gently, stepping up closer to him.

"I . . . yes, I do. I'm nothing but a big show-off; always wanting the attention focused on me. I'm sure this is the reason. Right?"

I felt a weight lift off me: Tad had replied in such a candid way that I would not need to tell him. My heart lifted a prayer of praise and thanksgiving Heavenward to my gracious Father for helping me and coming to my aid.

"Would you like to change?" I asked in a kind and gentle way. "I've been praying for you, Tad. So have all the young people in our church. They want to be friends with you."

Tad was silent for a long while. Then he raised his eyes and looked me squarely in the face. "I guess a show-off does become wearisome and..., and even obnoxious, Tom. I feel so embarrassed after my show-off antics are over and I become so disgusted with myself that I declare I'll never do a repeat performance. But I'm helpless when I get around those my own age, or older. Then the urge possesses me and off I go again, showing off."

"Would you like to change, Tad? You can, you know. The Lord Jesus Christ living in you will make all the difference. You will become new in Christ and this show-off spirit will be forgiven. Then, as you go on into holiness of heart, it will be taken out of your heart. Will you please let me pray with you, Tad? Do you want to be different -- in Christ?"
Tears glistened and shimmered in Tad's eyes. "I've been wanting to become a Christian for a long, long time, Tom, only no one ever asked me. Yes, I'm ready. I want the Lord to do for me what He did for you."

It was easy to pray. But it is always like this when the heart is ready to be converted, and Tad was. He looked radiant when we finally got up from our knees on the porch where we knelt beside a couple chairs. He was joyously happy and he let me know it: he couldn't contain himself.

We didn't go on the little pre-planned, pre-arranged bicycle jaunt: I spent most of the morning instructing him from the Bible, as per his request and his immediate hunger-thirst to "know what God says," in his own words.

Riding homeward later on, my heart did a number of quick flip-flops of purest joy and holy jubilation: Tad was now washed in the Blood of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial Lamb slain for the sins of the world. The show-off was changed; radically so.

I could scarcely wait for the fellows to return from their trip. Like myself, they would be happy. Yes, extremely happy. And I knew now that, without a doubt, Tad would be a most welcome addition to our young people's group.