

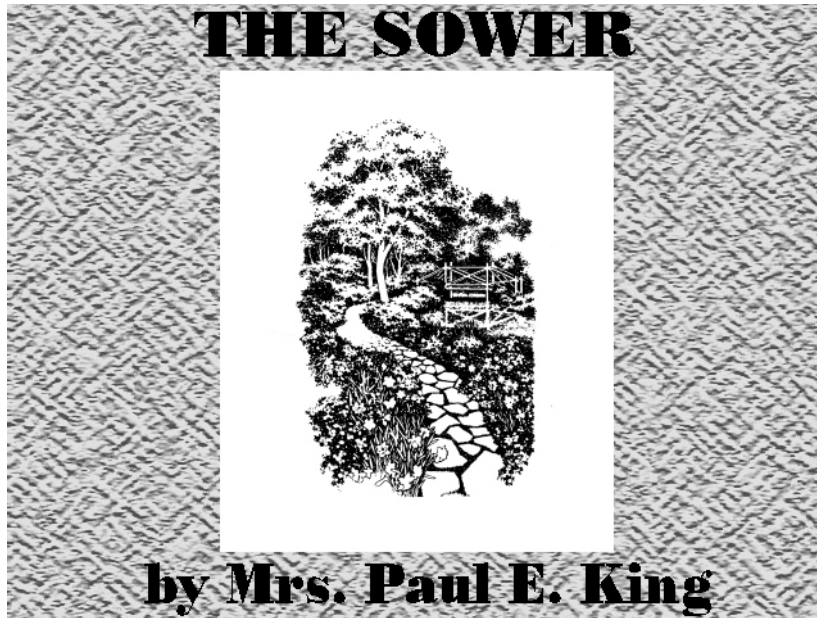
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THE SOWER
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The sky was cloudlessly clear and blue, as blue as the blue of a robin's egg, and the sun in its midday travels across the heavens was scorching-hot and brilliantly-bright. The lone traveler, on an out of the way road, plodded down the dust-covered road with purpose and determination -- he must reach everyone in the valley with the good news that had been brought to him by the little old widow in his neighborhood. He must do it. He must!

He walked on. The satchel containing his precious and priceless treasures was slung carefully over his shoulders by an ingenious contraption rigged up by his ingenious mind, and with each and every step he took dust eddies circled around his feet and his dark pants legs, leaving their tell-tale signs in a powdery film all over his lower extremities.

Perspiration trickled from his forehead and ran down his ruddy, sun-bronzed cheeks. The frayed, much-worn and battered straw hat sitting on top of his head had seen better days. Its best days, really. Still, its tattered, once-wide brim managed to keep off a modicum of the sun's hot rays from his cheeks and out of his eyes.

He came to a tree-shaded spring and carefully removed the satchel from his tired shoulders, then he lifted the hat from his head and raised his hands heavenward in thanksgiving to God for the crystal-clear, cool water. And then he drank. Never had water tasted so good; so delicious. He drank until his thirst was fully quenched and until he could drink no more. Next he placed the little collapsible cup in an upside-down position for drying on the end of a stick which he had stuck into the ground.

What a magnificent day the Lord had given to him to do His work in, he mused silently as he wet his handkerchief in the cold water and washed his sweaty face over and over again and again before sprawling out on a grassy mound beneath the densely-shaded trees.

He closed his eyes and folded his hands across his chest and was soon asleep, while the leafy trees whispered above him and the cool spring gurgled pleasantly nearby. The man could truly say with the Psalmist, ". . . he giveth his beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2).

Birds, from perches in the leafy branches, cast curiously-wary glances upon the form of the sleeping man and, after deciding that the strange creature lying inanimate upon the cool grasses was harmless, soon burst out in beautiful melodies of song and went about their business as though no one had paused beside the merry little spring.

The traveler, not more than twenty minutes later, awoke to the lusty and joyous song of the birds. He opened his eyes and looked upward,

wishing there was some way he could communicate his gratitude and thanks to the beautiful songsters.

"Thank you," he said, in his soft, well-modulated voice as he looked up into the branches. "And thank You, kind Father, for the refreshing sleep and the water. Thank You, my God. Thank You!"

In an instant's time he was on his feet. Standing tall -- a full six foot-three -- and lanky-lean, he stretched his arms upward and outward a full forty or more times, rubbed his shoulders, massaged the base of his neck, then fastened the satchel carefully over his shoulders with his ingenious contraption and, aider collapsing the little hand-held collapsible cup, he started again down the dusty, sun-baked road with the song of the birds ringing in his ears.

The first farm house he came to was small and poor looking. He walked up the two steps to the door and knocked. Silence reigned. There was no sign of life. None whatever. He knocked a second time. Still no response.

He waited awhile then walked around the house to the back door. There he noticed the rotting, half-opened outside cellar doors and the equally rotting back porch floor. The house all but shouted its no-one-lives-here message to him. Still, one could never tell just who might come up to the doors out of curiosity or. . . .

Thus thinking, the man pulled a tract from his satchel and stuck it carefully in along the door jamb. Then he walked on.

He crested a knoll and looked down upon one of the most beautiful farms he had ever seen. Everywhere he looked, the grass was green and the crops were flourishing, watered by irrigation sprinklers. Cattle lolled and ate in pastures lush and green. Nearby, sheep grazed contentedly in meadows thick with meadow grasses beside a pellucid stream, cool-looking and leaf-shaded with trees growing on either side of it.

In tree-shaded fields some distance away, colts, foals and fillys frisked and kicked and played in their acres and acres of thick, lush grass, all of which was fenced in with miles of white-painted board fencing. The barn, with its six towering blue silos and its adjacent out-buildings and shed, bespoke of orderliness, care, concern, hard work, and wealth.

The man looked on in awe. What beauty stretched out before his eyes! What exquisite beauty! The house itself looked like something from a magazine with its English Tudor architecture, its meticulously kept and well-manicured sprawling lawn and its myriad flower gardens, its two gazebos and its trellised, blooming roses and vines. Everywhere his eyes looked, prosperity looked back at him.

Prosperity, yes; and wealth, he thought silently; but what about the prosperity of the occupants' souls!

Rich or poor, he had an obligation to them, he remembered. With hurried step, he traversed the distance from the top of the knoll to the farmhouse and lifted the handle of the door knocker.

"Yes?" came the query of the smiling woman before him, and before he had time to reply, she said, "You're a peddler, I presume. Thank you, but I have need of nothing." With that, the door was shut in his face.

He stood in mute silence, praying silently and wondering whether or not to knock again. ". . . I have need of nothing" resounded in his soul like a death knell. It sent a chill through his body. He recalled the verse in Revelation: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Drawing a tract from his satchel, he placed it carefully and prayerfully beneath the handle of the heavy door knocker then he took his departure.

Mile after mile he traveled, zig-zagging across the fertile fields, stopping at farm house after farm house and leaving tracts and New Testaments wherever they were wanted and received. He testified to God's saving grace, His sanctifying and keeping power and prayed before departing, wherever and whenever he was received.

Nightfall found him in a little village in the valley. He was led to a household of humble, praying people who put him up for the night and gave him a hearty supper of stew and bread and a breakfast of mush and milk, humble but satisfying fare for a weary traveler. He departed by invoking God's choicest blessings upon the gracious and hospitable hosts, leaving

behind a New Testament to replace the badly worn and tattered one used for morning and evening devotions.

He knocked on every door in the village, receiving a warm reception from some and a cold shoulder from others. At one door, toward which he was hurrying, he saw the face of a frightened looking woman staring at him.

"Good morning," he called pleasantly. "May I please have a few minutes of your time? I represent the Lord Jesus Christ and, as such, I would like to leave His Word with you."

"No. No!" the woman cried, seeing the New Testament in the man's hand. "I must not take it: It is not for me."

"It is for you, good lady; every single word in it is for you! For me too. And for everybody. Read it, obey it, and you will have eternal life."

By now the woman drew near to the screen door. Then, covering her eyes with her hands, she disappeared down the hallway, reminding the traveler of a frightened, half-starved animal, wanting proffered food but afraid of being beaten or scolded if accepting it.

Feeling constrained of the Spirit to be patient, he waited. Within a few minutes she was back at the door.

"You . . . you must leave," she appealed urgently, casting a furtive glance up and down the street.

"Accept this, please, with my good pleasure and deep satisfaction as a gift from God."

"Then you will leave?" she questioned anxiously.

"Then I will leave," he replied. "Yes, then I will leave."

Reaching out quickly, the woman took the New Testament and deposited it immediately in an ample apron pocket then she closed the door, saying, "Thank you. Thank you. Leave, please. And, again, thank you!"

The man bowed his head in prayer, asking God's blessing and help for the frightened woman then he hurried away to the next house, thanking God for the everlasting and exceeding great promise that God's Word would not return unto Him void. There would be fruit coming from that hastily accepted New Testament. He was sure of it. So very sure.

Four doors away, he encountered a burly looking man coming rapidly up the street. He looked mean and brutish.

"Good morning, my friend," he said in a kindly manner as he extended a friendly hand outward in greeting to the man.

"Good morning yourself," came the terse, curt reply. "Out of my way. What are you doing in our town? What brings you here?" Seeing the satchel over the shoulders of the traveler, he sneered: "A peddler, eh? A peddler? Ha. Ha. Ha. A poor, common peddler! Ha. Ha. Ha. Why, you catapult me back in time; back to when I was a little boy. I thought all peddlers disappeared with that long-ago era. Ha. Ha. Ha. What a joke! A common peddler in our town! Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha."

The traveler watched as the man staggered away, down the street and up the porch to where the frightened looking woman lived. Suddenly he knew the reason for her fear and her fright. Yes, suddenly he knew. Then it was that he marveled at God's perfect timing. And, yes, at God's concealment too: For without any shadow of doubt, God had either closed the man's eyes to the New Testament in his hand or he was too drunk to notice. He thought him to be a "common peddler."

"Let him continue to think that, dear Lord," he prayed. "Yes, let him continue to think that I am a common peddler, and please protect the frightened little woman from his brutality. Save her soul, I pray in Jesus' name with thanksgiving."

The man traveled on, traversing the valley with its farms and its villages until every household that would accept and receive it had a New Testament and a gospel tract or two.

The years came and went, as years are prone to do, and with one of the years' passing the faithful traveler also made his final journey. No more would he travel and traverse countryside after countryside with the satchel

containing his precious and priceless treasures slung carefully over his tired shoulders by an ingenious contraption rigged up by his ingenious mind; no more would dust eddies swirl and blow around his aching feet and leave their powdery film coating his pants legs and lower extremities; no more would the "common peddler" -- mistakenly so-called -- be scorned and mocked and laughed at: ah no! He had received his summons to "enter thou into the joys of thy Lord: Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many."

A common traveler, converted and sanctified wholly and totally committed to doing God's will -- a dedicated and faithful sower of the gospel seed! And some ". . . fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 13:8-9).