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THE CHANGELESS ONE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Leaning heavily on his hickory cane for support, the bespectacled man looked across the corn-stubbed field to the heavy equipment and the big dump trucks pulling away from the now-finished, newly-constructed bridge and section of road leading to and from the bridge. Involuntarily, a tear sneaked from his eyes and trickled down his wrinkled cheeks. All spring and summer he had watched the crew of workers from the big front porch where

he sat in the sturdy but much-used rocking chair that Amanda and he had from the day they had married and set up housekeeping for themselves. He had a bird's eye view of everything that went on, and a part of his heart twisted and turned and knotted then seemed to be wrung from him as he watched the work crew carry out their orders, wreaking havoc to both the land and the old familiar landmarks. And now they were finished.

He leaned harder on the sturdy hickory cane. The knuckles of his gnarled work-worn hands showed white as he gripped the cane's head fiercely, feeling the hot tears run down his cheeks then bounce to the porch floor. The bridge was gone: torn down, and carried away in noisy dump trucks, to where, he had no idea. The bridge over which he and Amanda had traveled for all of their married years. The bridge which he had crossed countless times to bring the hay and wheat and corn from the fields on the other side of the creek into the barn, the granary and the corn crib of the farm. The bridge from which his children had fished and played. Gone.

He closed his eyes, hearing again in memory's ears the steady clip clop of the horses as they pulled the wagon across the old stone bridge, narrow but adequate for all the farmers' needs. A right stout and sturdy bridge it was. Camel's Bridge, it was called. And rightly so: it was humped like a camel's back in its center, to allow for flooding. And now it was gone. Torn down. Smashed. Carried away. In its place was a broad, wide, smoothly paved, brand new bridge.

Hearing the steady flow of traffic, the man opened his eyes and watched as the cars flowed smoothly and quickly across the new bridge, passing each other -- those going south and those going north -- instead of stopping at the end of the bridge and checking before proceeding across to make sure nothing was coming at the opposite end of the bridge.

The old man sighed. The new bridge was beautiful, he had to admit. Progress, they had called it. Progress? Change! That was it; change. And while he knew he had to adjust to change, he knew there were some things he would never be able to accept nor adjust to. Never! Take the church, for instance. His church: the church in which he and Amanda had raised their children. The church where hell's fire was once preached and where sinners ran to the altar for mercy and pardon and forgiveness. The church from whose pulpit was thundered that carnality had to be eradicated -- extirpated - - taken out, root and all, and that one had to be wholly and entirely sanctified-

made pure and holy and clean in order to get into Heaven's Holy City. When was the last time he had heard such Biblical preaching? When?

He bowed his head and groaned. With the resignation and retirement of old Brother Faithful, a certain segment of the church membership felt it was now time to call a man of "higher learning," "with fresh, new ideas; a "man of the times"; someone who was "with it," whatever that meant. He, for one, still had no idea what the minister was "with." And as for him being a "man of the times," the church hadn't heard a single message on the signs of the times or on the second coming of Christ since his coming more than three years ago.

Instead of praying and weeping and groaning over souls in the once well-filled prayer rooms in the church, there were games, shows, slides and such like things. Programs. Programs. Programs. But where was the glory? Where? Where were the weeping, sobbing, penitent sinners seeking God's mercy and pardon around an altar? Where were those who were hungering and thirsting after a pure and a holy heart? The altar had, for the most part, been barren now. Oh, it was used, to be sure; but mostly at Easter when lilies lined it from one end to the other.

The old man groaned again. He would never accept -- or adjust to -- the modern changes in his church: It was too much like a playhouse or an entertainment center.

"Henry," the man of "higher learning" had said to him one day on a rare visit to his home, "I know it grieves you; these changes in the church. But it's the only way to reach people anymore. It's not like it was in your day, Henry: people didn't mind going to church then: they didn't have much more to do and no other place to go. The boys would go to church to see the pretty girls and. . . ."

"Please, Brother Wellsby," Henry had said softly, interrupting the unfinished sentence, "sure, some came to see the girls, that's true. Very true. But people came, back then, to meet with God. To get right with God and to worship Him. For miles around, men and women and children trembled under holy conviction and the fear of God and sought Him in their homes and out in the pastures and the woods until they knew their sins were forgiven and until the awful nature of carnality was destroyed. Crucified. This didn't 'just happen'; it came about by nights and weeks of earnest praying and humbling,

intercessory prayer and fasting. It's still, 'when Zion travails,' that spiritual babes are born.

"God doesn't change His standards and His methods for the times: with Him, there is no change. Not ever. What got men and women to God back in my day will still bring them today if we will go back to the old landmarks and humble ourself and pray and seek His face in travailing, agonizing, intercessory prayer and fasting, until His glory -- His Holy Presence -- comes back to our services and fills the sanctuary with His glory. There is no substitute for the glory of God. None whatever! It is the presence of God that draws and attracts."

The minister had gotten to his feet and in a curt way declared that his methods were the only methods to use and his way was the only way to go for the modern day in which they both were living.

"Times have changed, Henry," the preacher had emphasized. "What once appealed to young people no longer attracts them nor appeals to them. They're smart these days; they think for themselves. Well, I'll be on my way. Good day, Henry. Sorry you can't see things my way. . . ."

As he watched the minister drive away, tears spilled from Henry's eyes and Romans 1:21-22 had come to mind then; "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

How he had grieved as one change after the other had come into the church and the once wonderful glory and presence of God had departed and was gone.

Leaning against a porch post for support now, the elderly Henry wept, then groaned within himself. Since the preaching of God's Word was no longer preached in its entirety and sin was no longer denounced and cried out against in all its vileness and its hideousness, many of the young people from the church had rented apartments and were now living with a boyfriend or girlfriend, as the case may be, without being married. Many homes were in a sad state of moral decay and breakup, and children, in all too many cases, were left alone to fend for themselves as best as they could.

Change! Again the old man groaned within himself. When had it begun, and where? He knew. Ah, yes, he knew. It was when the pulpit became silent and failed to "blow the trumpet"; failed to "cry aloud, and spare not, and shew my people their sins." The fear of God was no longer evident among men while an attitude of permissiveness and total unrestraint seemed to be prevalent everywhere. Oh, for an outpouring of Holy Ghost power in their midst again! For a Heaven-sent revival!

Turning, the man leaned heavily upon his cane and headed for the door. Prayer! That was it! He could pray. And he would. Ah, yes. Yes. So long as breath remained in his body, he would pray -- for revival; for a return back to God by those who named the name of Christ; for a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them all.

Going inside and closing the door behind him, he picked up his well-worn, much-used Bible and hymn book then shuffled his way into the bedroom to a favorite chair. Gently, he opened the hymn book to a favorite hymn. Seldom ever was the book used in church anymore. The hymns had served their purpose well, and spiritually so, for many generations; now, however, they too, were considered to be "outdated" and entirely too old-fashioned for use in the church. Choruses, with strange sounding tunes and, in many cases, indistinguishable words, were used Sunday after Sunday; some of them, even, to the wild beat of drums and the loud noise of electric guitars, played so loudly as to make the church vibrate. It was hard -- impossible, really! -- to worship or, even, to feel worshipful with the sound of rock music pounding one's ears mercilessly and deafeningly. Oh, for the singing of the God-inspired, dear old hymns again! Hymns that blessed, comforted, stirred and moved upon one's heart with gentle and tender stirrings by the blessed Holy Spirit and prepared the heart for the anointed message by the minister.

Turning to "It Is Well With My Soul," Henry sang softly and reverently, verse after verse. For many years, the hymn had been his testimony. He turned quickly to "Constantly Abiding," then, finishing it, he went to "The Comforter Has Come." As he sang, he worshipped. And praised. And then, in a sweetly wonderful way, he felt the Presence of his Friend! The Lord Himself had come down into the room to sup with him. What glory! What joy! Tears streamed down his cheeks; tears of joy. Of peace.

Clutching the Bible and the hymn book to his heart, he slipped from the comfortable chair to the floor on his knees. The way to victory was to place one's trust completely and entirely in the reliable and the changeless -- in God! In Him there was no change; no variableness. He, and He only, remained constantly and eternally the same.

Looking heavenward, he began to pray.