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**PROVIDING THINGS HONEST**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Paul scratched his head thoughtfully and glanced quickly across his shoulder to see if the taciturn Mr. Schuster was still eyeing him with that stern, reproofing look he'd given him all morning; ever since he'd "caught" him giving exact measures and accurate weights to the store man's customers.

"I'll have a talk with you later on," Mr. Schuster had said, giving him a look of contempt. Paul knew what that meant. Ah, yes, he did.

The grocery store was bustling with business this Saturday and Mr. Schuster wouldn't dare to scold him in front of the customers. They were the aged man's bread and butter and Paul was the favorite carry-out, produce-weigher and stock boy. At least the store's poll revealed that he was. Each year the customers voted for their favorite grocery boy and, though he was relatively new to Schuster's Grocery Shoppe, Paul pulled 82 percent of the votes. Not infrequently did he hear a customer exclaim to Mr. Schuster how "courteous, polite, helpful, gentlemanly and honest the new boy is."

As he weighed bananas and oranges for a tired looking woman, Paul wondered suddenly if Mr. Schuster might fire him because of his honesty. Squaring his shoulders and marking the exact price and weight on the bags of fruit, he placed them carefully in the woman's grocery cart saying, "Have a good day, lady, and may God bless you."

The woman turned and looked at him. A smile suddenly twisted the corners of her mouth. "Thank you," she answered. "Thank you. I'm sure I will.., now."

Looking over the produce, Paul noticed several bad oranges and some apples wearing brown spots on their skins. These would be mealy, he knew, and not all hard and juicy. Picking them up, he noticed the soft spots in them. He removed them from the display and replaced them with firm, hard apples . . . placing the bad ones in a box beneath the counter. Mr. Schuster had told him once to "work them in among the good," but he couldn't do it. He couldn't! That would be dishonest. Let the grocer man fire him: he would not give less weight and charge more; nor would he work bad produce in with the good. It wasn't right. God was looking down upon those scales and on his markings on the grocery sacks, too! He would have to answer to God Almighty for his deeds . . . be they good or bad, evil or righteous.

"There he is. That's the boy," a voice said, coming nearer. "You can trust him, Miriam," the woman was saying to her companion. "He always gives me only the finest fruits and vegetables. For a long time I refused to do any trading here. They had a boy who never gave accurate weights and full measure . . . and charged me more, too! But this new boy's honest. He wouldn't cheat you out of an ounce. . . ."

Paul didn't let on like he had heard. He was whistling softly as the pair approached him.

"I want three pounds of seedless white grapes," one of the women said; "two pounds of green beans and six pounds of oranges. . . ."

"Do you have any good potatoes for baking?" the other woman wanted to know, as Paul selected and weighed the grapes and oranges.

"I have just a few left," he told her. "The truck should be bringing more by on Monday, the Lord willing."

"I need 18 nice sized ones today," the woman said, "I'm having dinner guests and. . . ."

"I'll check for you," Paul said, finishing the first woman's order and hurrying to the back room.

He returned carrying seven potatoes in a basket. "With these seven," he said, showing them to the woman, "and the eight you see on the counter, I can give you fifteen nice potatoes. There's more back there," he continued, nodding toward the storage room, "but they have bad spots in them. I sorted through them. I wouldn't want to sell you any bad ones. . . ."

The women looked at each other and smiled a pleasant smile. Woman number one wore that pleased, "I told you so!" look on her face. After a while, she spoke to her friend. "I have several left from last week's purchases," she said. "These fifteen and my two or three should see you through. . . ."

When the potatoes were weighed, and after the women had departed, Mr. Schuster's words of another day resounded in Paul's ears. They had been low on bakers that day too. "You're too conscientious!" the grocer had bellowed. "A potato's a potato! Most people don't know the difference; stick some others in the sack. They'll eat them."

"But they asked for baking potatoes," Paul answered calmly.

"After this, do as I say!" the store man ordered sternly.

But he just couldn't, Paul realized again. He was a Christian and he had no desire whatever to do wrongly. He would please Christ . . . even if it meant disobeying Mr. Schuster's orders and losing his job. One need never please and obey his employer's orders to the violation of God's higher commands and orders. God's "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" would be his guidelines for proper conduct and intercourse with his fellow man. His first obligation was to God . . . and His Word.

It was after closing time when Mr. Schuster confronted Paul.

"What are those apples and oranges doing in that box beneath the counter?" he asked.

"They're either bad or going bad, Sir."

Mr. Schuster picked several of the oranges up and held them in his hand. "These could be worked into the sack with the good fruit!" he countered angrily. "Look at that orange!" he exclaimed, holding it before Paul. "The customer would never notice the difference."

"When they went to eat it they would, Mr. Schuster. There's a very bad place in that orange."

"One spot! No bigger than a quarter!" the store man ejaculated angrily, tossing the fruit up on the counter with the good. The whole fruit.

"I wonder," Paul's words came out kindly but right to the point, "if you or I were the customer how we'd feel when we got home, to discover our produce man had sold us bad produce or fruit."

"It can be overlooked as a mistake," Mr. Schuster said slyly.

"But it wouldn't be a mistake, Sir. Not in my case. I can spot bad produce at a glance, and for me to 'work' the bad in with the good would be a gross sin. I cannot do it, Mr. Schuster; and I won't. I'm a child of God... by way of the new birth. I've been converted. Changed. Made 'new' in Christ. As such, I am instructed by God's Word to 'provide things honest in the sight of all men' Rom. 12:18."

Mr. Schuster cleared his throat. "Speaking of honesty . . . that reminds me, you are too honest. When you weigh your product, push down on the scales with your hand. Most customers never pay too much attention anyhow."

Paul drew himself up to his full 5 feet 11 1/2 inches. "Never, Mr. Schuster! Never! I'll not cheat. Never! Hebrews 13:18 says, 'In all things willing to live honestly'; and I Thessalonians 4:12 tells us to 'walk honestly towards them that are without. . . .' If you forbid me to deal honestly toward your customers I shall terminate my services in your store and look elsewhere for employment. Regardless of what you do to me, I mean to keep 'a conscience void of offense toward God and man. . . .'"

"Very well, Paul. Since I see I can't change you . . . and you certainly won't change me! . . . I shall pay you your wages now. I will need your service no longer."

Walking home in the darkness, Paul's heart felt clean and light. He had a direct line to God. It was an open line . . . prayer!

As he walked through the kitchen door of his home, his father called to him. "Is that you, Paul?" he asked.

"Sure is, Dad."

"You're wanted on the phone. . . ."

"Paul," it was Mr. Harrison from the Colonial Grocery Shop, "I was wondering if you ever thought about working elsewhere than for Mr. Schuster? I need an honest, dependable boy, and since you've already had experience, I wonder if you may be interested? To tell you the truth, I've been praying about God sending me a Christian boy, and your face keeps coming before me. What about it? Would you be interested?"

"Ye . . . yes, Mr. Harrison. I certainly would be interested. It would be great to work for you. Due to pressure exerted upon me at the other store . . . pressure to do evil . . . I . . . I'm without a job as of tonight."

"Not any more, you're not. You're hired; as of this very moment you're an employee at Colonial. When can you begin work?"

"On Monday after school, the Lord willing."

"Wonderful. Wonderful! See you Monday then, if God be willing and spares our lives. . . ."

As he replaced the receiver, Paul's heart was overflowing with praise. "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

He hurried into the living room to tell his mother and father what had happened.