

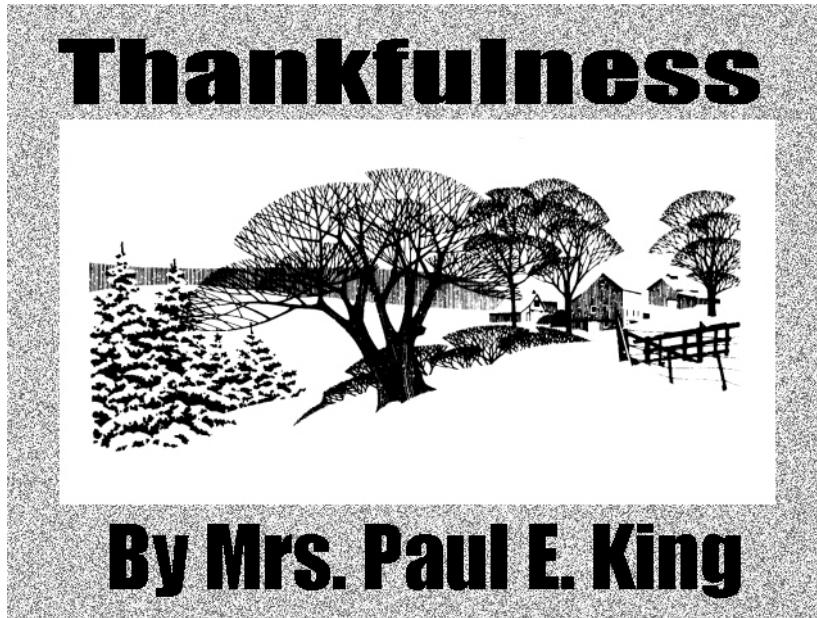
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**THANKFULNESS**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Clayton tiptoed out of the house, gun in hand and jacket collar pulled up around his neck. It was bitter cold as he stepped off the porch and left the familiar surroundings of house and shed and garage behind and took off at a brisk pace across the meadow. Ever since his recent conversion and subsequent experience of entire sanctification, he had been praying and

asking the Lord to help him get a gobbler for Thanksgiving. It would mean ever so much to the family, he knew. His mother especially and particularly.

Since his father's death, his mother's life had become increasingly hard and bitter. She felt forsaken and forgotten -- abandoned -- by God. The news of his untimely death while at work left her with an icy-cold heart, it seemed. Clayton shuddered each time he thought about it. It was so unlike the gentle mannered woman who had cared so lovingly and tenderly for each of her five offspring when husband and father was living and working.

Clayton marveled at the sudden and radical changes that transpired and took place around the little farm since the funeral and the burial. Old Beckie Crasser was a daily visitor to the house now, always making herself "handy," as she phrased her labors of love, and finding something to do; something that would take the burden off his mother's shoulders. There was always fresh baked bread a-plenty now, with the extra, golden-brown crusted loaves being placed in freezer bags and stored inside the big freezer for whenever needed. Pies and cakes became staples on the table again, all gifts of Beckie's "pie-gifted" hands, as the neighbors addressed and spoke of her hands.

Beckie was doing everything within her sweet power and self to help Abigail Montour to see and know and realize that, though death snatches one from the household, still God remains good and kind and all-wise and maketh no mistake. Beckie knew this; she knew it by experience; and the experience of loss of husband and father only drew Beckie closer and nearer to the side of the One Who had promised, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Beckie's life was hard too: the thirty-acre farm needed tilling and harrowing and sowing and planting the same as when R. B. was alive and took care of it. R. B. II took care of the tractor work in the fields when he was finished with his own plowing and discing and planting and harvesting, to be sure. But the three jerseys had to be milked twice daily and the flock of laying hens had to be fed and watered each day too. Their eggs had to be gathered and their house cleaned regularly. Beside all this, Beckie always had a big garden that she kept in A-1 condition. Her vegetables and fruits frequently made their way to the neighbors' tables. Beckie's big heart far outstripped her petite, less-than-100-pound body. Beckie was a saint in work clothes and shoe leather and Beckie was determined that Abigail Montour must change. For the better.

The distant whine of the tractor let Clayton know that R. B. II was already at work plowing the snow out of their lane. He, Clayton, had worked hard trying to shovel out the many drifts yesterday, until R. B. II walked across the fields from his mother's small farm and told him that the tractor would have it plowed out in no time at all and for him to go home.

"Bless our kind neighbors," Clayton prayed. "Bless them richly."

Quickly, the young man's thoughts wandered back to Beckie. And then, just as quickly, they darted to his mother. What made the difference in how each handled her sorrow and grief and tragedies? What was it? he wondered, walking briskly toward the woods where, days earlier, he had seen a flock of wild turkeys.

Like a light was turned on somewhere inside his brain, he remembered that Beckie was always thankful. Always. Little matter how trying the problem or critical the situation, the brave little woman was thankful in all things: even when R. B. passed away and left her a widow! Oh, she wasn't thankful because R. B. died: No. No. Beckie wasn't a fanatic. Not by any means. But Beckie knew God, and Beckie trusted God's all-wise doings and ways. She knew that God was good, and that everything He allowed and permitted to come into her life was all carefully weighed out and sifted through long before it happened. It was for her good. Beckie believed this. So, in believing, she was able, with victorious and humble willingness and submission, to follow through on I Thessalonians 5:18 -- "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Clayton sighed. He felt a heaviness grip him somewhere inside his heart: it was a heaviness for his mother. Oh, how he loved her! Why had she allowed his dear father's passing away to embitter her so? he wondered. It should have drawn her closer to the Lord, not driven her away from Him, he reasoned soberly.

Tears glistened in his eyes; then they trickled down his ruddy cheeks like crystal jewels, made thus by the biting, stinging wind. His father's passing had been the thing that had brought him out of his cold, dead, lifeless profession of faith into the joyous reality of sins forgiven and, subsequently, into the blessed experience of heart cleansing by the Holy Spirit. Those last words -- the final, parting questions put to him by his dad -- were like darts

piercing his soul: "Are you ready for Heaven, Clayton? Have you been washed in the Blood? Will I see you over there?"

He hadn't been able to get away from the questions nor could he shake them off. They clung and stuck and pricked like a burr; a giant burr. So, immediately following the viewing of the silent form resting peacefully in the casket, he -- Clayton -- had driven to the church, whose doors were never locked, and there, kneeling at the altar, broken, repentant, and with penitential tears flowing, he had prayed through and was born again. Early the following morning he was back at the church altar praying for deliverance from the carnal nature. With joy and victory and glorious freedom in his soul, he then made his way to the funeral parlor and there, bending over the man he loved most on earth, he told him that, without any shadow of doubt whatever, he would meet him again -- in Heaven.

He wished he could have told his father this while he was still alive but, in his heart, he felt that he knew. If the angels in Heaven rejoiced when a sinner came to God then, surely, his father saw and knew that his son was now a possessor and not a mere professor.

Clayton entered the woods just as snow began to fall. How he loved the deep silence of the forest and the woods. It had a way of calming any and all of his fears, when and if he had any, and of honing and whittling problems clear down to nothingness. It was as if he had entered a beautiful open air cathedral in which God walked, and where He bade him to drop every burden and anxious care and to leave them outside the forest and to never again pick them up: they were too cumbersome and heavy, in the first place, and never were relieved by worry or fear and doubt.

His thoughts zeroed in on hunting now. He must be extra careful, he knew, and not make noise: turkeys were elusive and wary and spooked easily; getting one was the dream of every hunter, he guessed. His was no mere dream, however; necessity, and faith in the God who answered prayer, had set him afoot this early morning hour.

Walking almost as silently as an Indian on moccasined feet, Clayton followed the meandering stream to where a huge tree had succumbed to a fierce storm some months past, then he cut north to a small ravine from where he headed up the sloping forested hillside. It was snowing heavier now; the gentle sound of the flakes falling upon the trees and the forest floor

sounded like the soft brush of angel wings to Clayton. He paused, bowing his head in reverence to the Creator of the woods, forest and snow. Then he prayed: it was a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for blessings innumerable and wonderful; a prayer of blessing and honor to the One All-wise, All-kind and who made no mistakes. None whatever. He would pattern his life after Beckie; he would praise, and be thankful in all things.

Feeling refreshed in his spirit and blessed in his soul, Clayton walked on snow-muffled feet up the sloping hill to the ridge. He was now almost at the spot where he had seen the turkeys. His good sense and keen intuition alerted him to be extra quiet and super cautious of his movements and his position.

Finding a spot from which he could see, he sat down at the base of the oak and leaned his back against the trunk, listening for the soft clucking sound of the hens which, in less than ten minutes, he heard. It was coming from his right. With joy and thankfulness, he realized the sound was growing louder, which could mean but one thing: the turkeys were getting closer.

Watching with bated breath, able to see but praying that he would not be seen, every faculty of his nearly eighteen years now alert and tingling with anticipation, he waited, and prayed. Suddenly, from out of a copse of oak trees six hens walked across a small clearing not far from where he sat, concealed from their view. Two more hens followed. Then, in awe, Clayton watched as a gobbler strutted into full view. What a beauty he was. What a beard! Behind him came another gobbler; a young one. Praying as he raised the gun and got a bead on the strutting gobbler, he fired. With a flurry of wings the hens and the young gobbler disappeared somewhere far below him. The strutting gobbler remained, however, stately and princely looking even in death, his nine-inch beard giving credence to the fact that, without any doubt whatever, he was king of his harem. A noteworthy and handsome king indeed.

Clayton lifted the beautiful bird up and spread his tail feathers out, fan like, noticing, as he did so, the magnificent markings and colors which his All wise Creator had given the gobbler for beauty and adornment. Then he fell to his knees in the snow on the forest floor and thanked the Lord for answering prayer in giving him the handsome gobbler.

All the way home, Clayton praised the Lord. He had so many things to be thankful for and, oh, what a lift his soul received simply by praising and thanking God! It was most refreshing; yes, indeed, to soul and spirit. He was beginning, now, to understand why Beckie was always so victorious and triumphant over all the "ill winds" that blew into her life. Her "thankful in everything" heart kept her afloat and well on top of her circumstances.

It was snowing hard by the time he reached the house. As he stomped the snow off his boots on the porch, the door suddenly flew open and, rushing to him, his mother exclaimed with tears, "Clayton! Clayton! Oh, my son, where have you been? I've been beside myself with worry. . . ." She broke out into great, heavy, heaving sobs, adding, "If anything happens to you, I'll die. Die! You're all that I have anymore. The others are all gone, on their own. You're the only sure thing I have."

Going to her and putting his arms around her, Clayton said kindly, "Mother, please don't speak this way. I could go Home just as quickly as Father did. God is the only sure thing there is. Though people and things and time pass away and are no more, God remains. Forever and always, He will be the eternally existent One. Lean on Him, Mother. Look to Him, not to people. And Mother, try to be thankful for the blessings the Lord has given to you: they are so many."

Shocked beyond measure, Mrs. Montour stopped sobbing. In a voice filled with emotion, she said, "Thankful? What is there to be thankful for, Clayton? Everything I had is gone -- a husband's love; his wise counsel and leadership; the weekly paycheck and. . . ."

"Pardon me, dear Mother, for interrupting; but Beckie's Biblical 'remedy' really works: 'In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' You're looking only on the dark side. Please start counting your blessings; find the rainbow of God's love and begin to count your blessings instead of losses and you will then become the mother that you were before Daddy went to Heaven. Will you meet him over there, Mother?"

Sucking her breath in quick-like, in shock, she replied, "If only I had Beckie's courage!"

"You need faith, Mother. Faith: Like Beckie. Beckie's faith in God is what gives Beckie her courage. And Beckie's faith is stimulated and made strong by her continual praise and thanksgiving to God. Oh, Mother, Mother, pray until the bitterness over Daddy's death is gone. Please!"

"I . . . I . . . Oh, Clayton, I see it. Please help me to . . . get back. Pray for me. My heart is so empty. So void. I see it! I see it! I pushed God aside. I coddled self-pity to my bosom and harbored bitterness in the inner sanctuary of my heart until He -- God -- departed. Oh, Clayton, I'm weary of it all. I want rid of it. . . ."

"Then we'll pray, Mother, and the God who gave me this fine gobbler for our Thanksgiving dinner, will restore to you the joy and the peace that once was yours."

"You . . . you mean . . . you got a turkey, Clayton?"

"God sent it, Mother, in answer to my prayers and praises. I heard you tell someone that there would be no turkey this Thanksgiving; that you felt God didn't care about us nor what happened to us. I knew He did. I asked Him to prove that He really did care about us by helping me to get a turkey. Here's the proof. He loves you, Mother. Oh, how much He loves you!"

"I'm sorry, Clayton. I was wrong. So very wrong. I want my heart filled with His peace and love and joy again. Please, let's pray. . . ."

Weeping, they stepped inside the kitchen door and began to pray. Clayton knew that Beckie's prayers and her every labor of love would soon be rewarded as Abigail prayed through to victory. Once again his home would function normally and harmoniously, with praise and thanksgiving, and love and kindness.

Thanking God for the victory he knew was sure, Clayton lifted his voice in loud praise and blessing.