

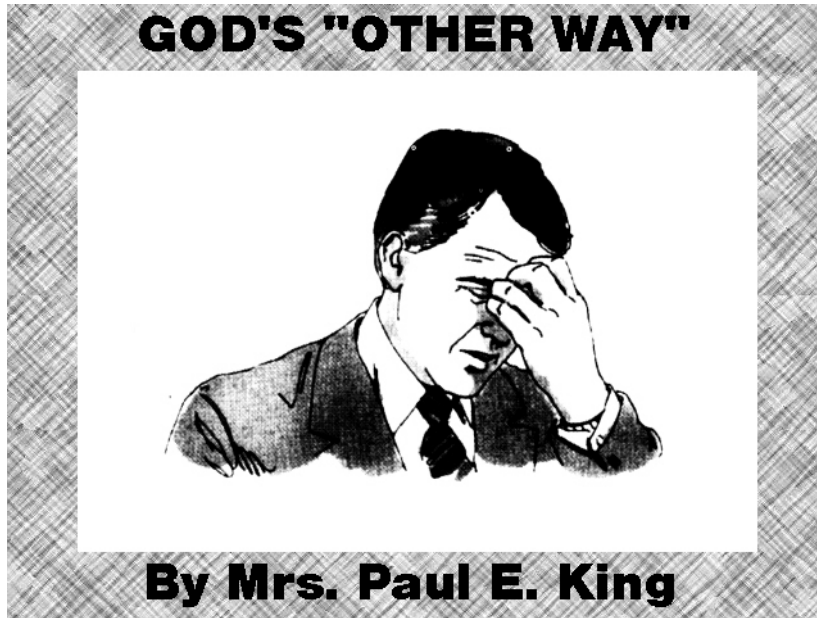
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GOD'S "OTHER WAY"
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Work was the furthest thing from Kevin's mind as he started out that late Friday afternoon for the place of his childhood and the home of his upbringing. The trip home no longer held the charm and the excitement of former years. With his mother's voice long since silenced by death and his father's physical man in a rapidly declining state, things were changed. In fact, it seemed to Kevin as though everything was turned inside out and

upside-down at the one place on earth he was sure would forever and always be the same, with always the pull and the lure to woo him back.

It had been that way, he mused now, until his mother took her final journey Home. The minute he had stepped on the porch that day, he felt the emptiness and the loneliness. Too, he sensed, with a pain too deep for words, the vacancy and the void which her departure had left. No more would he see her smiling at him, leaning over the porch railing, arms outstretched to welcome him as he drove up in front of the house and rushed into her arms the minute the car was parked. Nor would he hear the music of her laughter or the sweetness of her singing. Within a second of time and a final expulsion of breath, death had silenced forever the voice and the activity of the woman most important in his life: the woman who had given him life, who had nurtured him spiritually and physically from infancy on into his attainment of the full stature of manhood. She had taught him how to live and, in her final moments on earth, she had shown him how to die victoriously and triumphantly.

Kevin felt a catch in his throat; an ache somewhere in the pit of his stomach. Losing his mother was hard enough; but the shadow of things to come regarding his father, was tearing him apart in a way his mother's death had never done.

His hands gripped the steering wheel with fierce intensity. His knuckles showed white. His brow furrowed in perplexity and his eyes misted with tears. A groan, arising from the inner recesses of his heart, escaped his lips. He prayed for wisdom and guidance and the will of God in whatever he must do. It was painful. So very painful. He loved his father passionately. Deeply. He was his ideal of noble manhood, embodying everything and every quality of true God-likeness and saintliness that any man ever had. And now. . . .

Brushing a hand across his eyes, Kevin saw the woods ahead of him. It was a place that he knew as well as the back of his hand. It held myriad fond memories for him. His father had taught him the fine art of hunting in its region. The dear old homeplace nestled cozily and peacefully in its side less than half a mile away.

On an impulse, he pulled the car off the road, got out and looked around, inhaling long, deep draughts of the cool, fresh mountain air as he did so, while a nostalgia, so painfully sweet and reminiscent as to bring tears to

his eyes, washed over him in wave after wave of sadness. He stood for a while, thinking and remembering. Then, locking the car and shoving the keys into his pants pocket, he walked into the woods.

Excitement raced through him as he walked, slowly, deliberately and meditatively towards the top of the woods, where a thick stand of Douglas fir trees and myriad hardwoods grew. He needed the silence, he reflected; needed the quiet calm of the woods to meditate and pray; to make sure that he had the mind and the will of God in what he must do, now that the time had come.

Upon reaching the summit, he settled down on a stump and looked about him. Everything was so very familiar and so comforting. It would be a perfect duplicity of bygone days if his father were still able to be with him, he felt, as the knot inside his stomach constricted. He leaned his head into his hands and prayed in silence.

A breeze played through the branches of the trees above him, and then he heard them: two ravens coursed back and forth along the ridge line; their strangely-odd calls sounding like the utterances of old men mixing words with hacks and coughs. Loud cra-aaks, quorks, croaks and guffaws echoed along the ridge.

In a quick playback of another time, Kevin remembered how his father had pointed the ravens out to him on one of their many trips to the very ridge upon which he now was.

"I can't help but think of Elijah and how God commanded the ravens to feed him by the brook Cherith," his father had said as he watched the ravens that day and heard their strange calls.

Kevin recalled seeing his father's eyes misting with tears as he added, "It never ceases to amaze me; those birds feeding Elijah bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening. The only reason they didn't eat it was because God commanded them to feed His prophet. What a miracle! What an All-Powerful God! Not only did the wind and the waves obey Him, but the ravens did too. How wonderful it would be if mankind were obedient."

Kevin dropped to his knees by the stump and sobbed, unburdening the load of his heart to the Lord. Oh, if only his father would consent to move in

with Mary and the children and him. But he wouldn't. He loved the dear familiar home place too much to move.

"Thanks, Kevin," he had replied when the subject came up and the proposition-offer was given and made. "That's kind of Mary and you. Very kind. But I can't leave here. My roots are down too far and too deep for pulling up and transplanting. I love it here."

"But Father, you're not young any more. Mary and I want you. We want to take care of you now. All my growing up years, you and Mother looked out for me and took care of me. It's my turn now."

Smiling sweetly and placing a trembly hand upon his son's shoulder, Kevin recalled the soft response; "I want to die here, my boy. Like your mother did. I have the assurance of the Lord's promise that down to my last hour, my final breath, He will take care of me. I trust Him, Kevin. He has never gone back on His promises. Never. He cannot: He is God."

His reply? He had had none. What was there to say to a faith like that; a faith that remained steadfast and sure when life was ebbing away and time was running out?

Bowing and kneeling humbly and brokenly in prayer now, Kevin reminded the Lord of his father's words to him that day and of his unshakable faith in his God, adding simply, "I cannot doubt Thee, oh God. My faith rests in and upon Thee, whether You move upon him to come live with Mary and the children and me or some other way, I place my faith in Your hands. Thy will be done, not mine. Again, I remind Thee of Your promise to him. . . ."

The walk down the slope to the car was marvelous and wonderful. Everywhere he looked, he was reminded of the many happy years his father and he had roamed the woods together and hunted in it too. They were such good years; such pleasant years. His father had been his best male friend. He confided in him and shared many of the secrets of his heart with him. What a wonderful man he was!

A stalwart figure for God and truth and righteousness and true Holiness.

Kevin walked with deliberate steps, stopping every now and then to draw near strength and courage from God for the task that was at hand; the

thing that must be done. It seemed almost unreal, his father's sudden and rapid physical deterioration and declination; to see the once-tall, strong, well-built man with shoulders erect and quickened step now reduced to a mere shadow of his once-straight as an arrow, well-filled-out frame was almost more than he could stand and take.

He felt the knot constrict in his stomach again, bringing with it a sudden, sickening feeling. And then he knew that he couldn't put his beloved father in the nursing home, like Doctor Clayton had told him he must do. No, he couldn't. If he still refused to come home and live with Mary and him, he, Kevin, would find someone to move in and care for him. God would help Mary and him to meet the added expense this would incur, he knew. His parents had always provided for him, even to the point of sacrifice many times. It was time now for a reversal of things; a time for him to provide and sacrifice for his father.

Feeling light and joyful, and his heart at peace with the decision, Kevin got into the car and drove the short distance to the house, feeling eager and almost impatient to tell his beloved parent that, yes, he could finish out his remaining years in the dear old home place; that he would find a worthy, honest and upright person to stay and care for him.

He pulled up in front of the gate and got out of the car, feeling almost like his mother was there, waiting to welcome him home. He took the steps two at a time and opened the door, calling excitedly, "I'm home, Father. Where are you? I'm here."

There was no response.

Where was his father? he wondered. In the garden? How he loved the garden!

"I'm home," he said again. Still no response; no reply.

A quick glance through the kitchen windows let him know that his father was not in his much loved garden. A hoe leaned against the fence and nearby was a sprinkling can, each attesting to the fact that the man of the house had been working. But when, Kevin did not know. It must have been recent, however, he mused silently as he noticed the long, weed-free rows of

peas and other vegetables, still tender-green and not nearly so tall or stalwart as the early peas.

In fear, he left the kitchen window and went in search of his beloved father, to whom he had talked less than twelve hours earlier. It was not like him to not answer when he was called, especially when he knew that his son was coming home. Always, he came as quickly as his totterly legs would carry him to the door to welcome Kevin home and, always, Kevin noticed how his presence brought a warm glow to his dear parent's cheeks and a light to the sky-blue eyes. "Father," he called again, "I'm here. I love you." He hurried along the hallway to the bedroom. The door was open, of course; the bed was neatly made. Sitting in the rocking chair near a partially open window, his head resting on his chest and a smile upon his face, Kevin found his father. Instinctively, he knew.

"Daddy!" he cried, as he rushed to the chair and threw his arms around the lifeless, cold form. "Daddy! Daddy! I love you so much. Oh, Daddy!"

Like a veil was lifted from his eyes, he knew. Yes, he knew: God had chosen the "some other way" of his prayer for his wonderful father. His request to die at home had been granted and answered by God, and this, just two days before Easter!

Wiping tears from his face and his eyes, Kevin knelt beside the chair and, while holding and stroking his father's hand, he thanked God for fulfilling His promises and for answering the prayer of the most saintly man he knew -- his father.