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PROVIDENTIAL IRONY
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Have You Been Struck By A Cruel Irony, A Seemingly Merciless Twist Of Fate?

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INTRODUCTION

One might define "irony in speech" as: "Saying sarcastically the exact opposite of what is meant." Such irony may be seen in the following two verses of scripture: Job 12:2 "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you." -- 1 Kings 18:27 "And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." In these verses, both Job and Elijah spoke in irony, meaning quite the opposite of their statements. And, "irony in speech" is often used in conversations yet today, especially when a biting sarcasm is intended, or when the exact reverse of the fact is stated humorously.

An "Irony of Occurrence" or a "Providential Irony" is an irony in the happenings of life, and might be described as "a twist in fate, a turn of events, a meting out of providence, bringing back to one quite the reverse of what is expected, desired, or deserved." In such ironies there is sometimes a "boomerang effect," -- a payback in "bitter irony" to an evil person with an unexpected dose of what the evil one has initiated or has been dishing out to others. A Biblical example might be Jacob's deception of his father to obtain his blessing versus Jacob's being deceived by his uncle Laban when Laban gave him Leah to wife instead of the promised Rachel. In Jacob's case, even this did not end the "payback," for he was later deceived by his own sons about what had happened to Joseph and for years Jacob mourned Joseph's death when in fact he was very much alive.

Providential Irony in the form of "payback" also upon Joseph's brothers when years after they sold him into slavery they became "slaves" to Joseph's stern will. Sensing this divine payback in providential irony, Judah said to the regal Joseph: God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants." Joseph's brethren meted out trauma and anguish to him, and providential irony brought back the same upon themselves.

Another example of the "payback" in providential irony is found in the book of Esther. Always aiming at his own exaltation, the wicked Haman built a gallows upon which to hang the innocent Mordecai, and then in a turn of fate most surprising and shocking to Haman, it was Mordecai who was exalted and it was he who hung upon the gallows intended for Mordecai.

One could cite other "payback" ironies in the Bible such as that of the hungry lions feeding upon the very ones who intended that Daniel be thus devoured, and the fiery heat of the furnace slaying the accusers of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego while it harmed them not in the slightest. But the "payback" irony of all time will be when Christ, "the stone which the builders rejected" is universally placed before the awestruck eyes of a Christ-rejecting world as the "Headstone of the Corner" -- the One upon whom all Truth and Hope is built. As the story goes, the rejected stone was rolled over the edge of Jerusalem's height into the valley of the son of Hinnom -- Jerusalem's garbage dump, then later retrieved and placed as the head of the Temple corner. Even so the rejected Christ, cast out of earthly Jerusalem, has been raised from the lowest depths to the highest heights, and shall one day soon sit as the great Headstone of all Humanity. Then, all human "stones" who were not "made ready before," 1 Kings 6:7 -- who do not fit into his Holy Temple by spiritual birth and divine shaping -- shall be rolled off of the heights of His presence into the eternal Gehenna Garbage Dump, where the worm dieth not and the fires are not quenched. This will be "PAYBACK" PROVIDENTIAL IRONY AT ITS GREATEST!

On the other hand, providential irony, in this world, often involves the return to a good or innocent person of what seems unfair and undeserved -- in which cases the irony may be termed a "cruel irony" -- something that either is plainly undeserved or that appears to be so. Here is a fictitious example: Prior to the time of cell-phones and such-like, a young doctor living in a nearby town, but some miles from his parent's home receives a phone call from his father telling him that his mother has suddenly fallen ill -- please come and help her quickly.

At high speed, the young man races in his vehicle toward the town beyond which his parents live. Meantime, unknown to the young doctor, an ambulance has picked up his beloved

mother and is rushing her from the edge of town in to the area hospital. His car and the ambulance meet on a curve just outside of town. In his haste he swings a bit wide on the curve, and in equal haste the ambulance driver "cuts" the curve a bit to the inside. The vehicles crash head-on. The mother of the young doctor is killed, but neither doctor and ambulance crew receive only minor injuries. The next day the headline in the local paper reads: DOCTOR KILLS HIS MOTHER WHILE RACING TO SAVE HER LIFE! -- a "cruel irony" indeed.

There have been many such cruel ironies in this world, in this life -- ironies that sometimes seem to malign the character of God for allowing such undeserved or unkind providences to fall upon the good, the innocent, and the upright. But behind many such "frowning providences" God "shows a smiling face," and that which seemed to be nothing but a cruel irony in this world may, in the world to come, prove to have been God's tenderest and best gift to us in this life.

Elaborating a bit more on "cruel ironies," consider briefly the facts of O. Henry's fictional short story, "The Gift of the Magi." In the following, I will present a brief overview of those facts, but please know that in so doing HDM does not endorse short hair for women -- I merely state the facts of the story:

Here is its essence: During an earlier era, Della and Jim, were a happy, but financially strapped, young couple living in a city flat. Each wanted to buy the other a desired gift: -- she desired to buy him an expensive fob for his gold pocket watch -- he desired to buy her a set of beautiful hair-combs for her lovely, below-the-knee-long hair. But as Christmas Eve approached, neither of them had the necessary funds to make the purchases. Della contrived to sell her hair to one who bought such, thinking that it would soon grow back and that she would thereby be able purchase Jim a handsome fob for his gold watch -- and thus she did. When Jim returned after work that night, he was shocked to discover that Della's hair had been cut. She attempted to console him with the thought that it would soon grow back, and forthwith she presented him with her dearly-bought Christmas gift -- the expensive fob to go with his gold watch. But, to her surprise and disappointment, Jim told her that he had sold his gold watch to buy her the desired set of combs for her long hair! So, there they sat with their dearly bought Christmas gifts: -- he with an expensive fob but without a watch to which it could be attached, and she with a beautiful set of hair-combs and no long hair in which to place them!

Thinking in terms of violated scriptures instructing against short hair for women and the wearing of gold, one might consider the irony of O. Henry's story to be more of a "payback" irony than a "cruel irony," but as considered by O. Henry it was more like the latter. Even taking the story in the light of scriptural injunctions, we might think of it as but a foretaste of the "cruel irony" that shall be visited upon the wicked when evil men and women discover how satan has tricked them into selling their souls for the fun, fame, and fortune of sin, only to be left with (1) no world in which to experience sin's enjoyments beyond death; (2) with nothing whereby true eternal pleasures can then be obtained; (3) with no way out of damnation's dilemma; and (4) with eternity to regret their foolish purchases and wail in remorse over the "cruel and eternal irony" brought on them by satan's deceptions!

Changing the thought, however, there are those ironies of occurrence that we might term "Happy Ironies" -- concurrences of happenings that both surprise and delight those to whom they

come. This fiction of my making could be classified as such: A infant-girl in a mid-western city is given up for adoption by a young mother who has been widowed and who is utterly unable to care for her child. The girl is taken to the west coast and raised there. Several decades pass. Both the physical mother and the adopted daughter have long yearned to meet, but civil law and circumstance have made it impossible for the mother to initiate contact. The daughter, a married woman, while on vacation with her husband and passing through the mid-west, by mere chance asks her husband to stop in the next little town so she can buy some hand-craft to do during part of their travel. She walks into the little arts and crafts store, strikes up a conversation with the woman clerk. The clerk was scheduled to be off that day, but agreed to fill in for another who was ill. Then, by an astonishing series of exchanges the clerk and the customer from hundreds of miles away discover that they are mother and daughter! Ironic indeed -- a totally unexpected, unplanned, "Happy Irony" bringing a joyous reunion with mother and daughter! Such providential ironies as this also occur from time to time -- perhaps much more frequently than the few instances of which we hear.

Now, taking leave of these introductory distinctions, observations, and examples, I will next present a number of different providential ironies gathered from our HDM Library. In so doing, however, I will not categorize them, but leave it to the reader to judge for himself, or herself, the best descriptive adjective for each irony.

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Part 1
THEY ASPIRED AFTER LAURELS

From Illustration file ABA-AWA, hdm1038:

Heliogabalus, the Roman emperor, being jealous of the power of the senate, invited the senators to a great feast. When they were overcome with wine, Heliogabalus left the hall. The doors were fastened without; yet the carousal continued. The emperor shouted to them from a glass door in the ceiling that, as they were ever aspiring after fresh laurels, they should now be satisfied. Wreaths and flowers began to rain upon them. The senators cried, "Enough! Enough!" but the rain continued. Terror seized them. They flew to the doors; but they were immovable. Escape was impossible. The relentless storm continued till all were buried and suffocated beneath the murderous sea of flowers.

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Part 2
HE LOOKED FOR A WEAK LINK

From Illustration file SAC-ZEA, hdm1043:

It is told of a famous smith of medieval times that, having been taken prisoner and immured in a dungeon, he began to examine the chain that bound him with a view to discover some flaw that might make it easier to be broken. His hope was vain, for he found, from marks upon it, that it was

of his own workmanship, and it had been his boast that none could break a chain that he had forged. Thus with the sinner; his own hands have forged the chain that binds him; a chain which no human hand can break.

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Part 3

A DIRECT HIT ON THE ENEMY TANK

From Illustration file BAC-CUR, hdm1039:

Manila, Philippines... Cpl. Robert Salvador cheered after destroying a rebel armed vehicle with his bazooka. Moments later, he discovered his brother, Roger; was dead in the flaming vehicle. The two brothers fought on opposite sides during clashes between government forces and mutineers seeking to topple President Corazon Aquino. The mutiny began Friday, and shooting continued in parts of Manila today. At the height of the uprising Sunday, rebels fiercely attacked the country's military headquarters, Camp Aguinaldo. Rebels entered the main gate behind an armored personnel carrier, which began firing. Robert Salvador, 25, aimed his bazooka at the vehicle and fired. It was a direct hit and the vehicle burst into flames. "At last, I got him!" he shouted. He then raced to the tank and discovered to his horror that his brother, Sgt. Roger Salvador, 29, was among the crew.

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Part 4

HE RESCUED THE LAST MAN

From Illustration file BAC-CUR, hdm1039:

A storm swept the ocean just off the coast of Scotland. Far out in the black trough of the angry waters a ship had gone to pieces. The lifeboat set out from shore in the face of what seemed almost certain disaster, but it came back with all the ship's crew except one. To have taken another in would have meant the sinking of the boat. As they came to shore the leader said, "There's another man! We need volunteers for his rescue. These men are exhausted."

Among those stepping forward was a fine-looking young Scotchman in the very prime of his life. His white-haired mother came and put her arms about him and said, "Don't go, John; years ago your father perished in the storm at sea. You know that just last year your brother William went to sea and never came back, and I guess he, too, must have gone down. John, you are the only one left, and if you should perish what would I do? Don't go, John; your mother begs you to stay."

He took her arms from about his neck and said, "Mother, I must go; a man is in peril and I would feel like a coward not to go. God will take care of us." He printed a kiss on her cheek and sprang into the boat. Every minute the fury of the storm increased. The elements seemed to vie with each other to see which one could do the worst. Down into the trough and up over the waves they

went. A whole hour they were gone, and finally in dim outline they were seen beating their way back.

As they came within hailing distance someone from the shore cried, "Have you found the man?" Standing in the bow of the boat John shouted back, "Yes, we've saved him, and tell my dear old mother it's brother William!"

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Part 5

WHEN "THE PRODIGAL BOY" WAS SUNG

From "Remarkable Occurrences," Chapter 5, hdm0047, by Beverly Carradine:

He was a Methodist preacher and had been for years a very useful one. He obtained the Baptism of the Spirit and became much more useful, getting not only his own church blessed, but holding meetings for his ministerial brethren and having gracious revivals on their works wherein many souls received free and full salvation.

The subject of this sketch, whose name was D., had the double gift of writing religious verses or hymns and composing melodies to wing them on their flight. He collected a number of his own composition and had them published in book form. God honored this little volume of Gospel song, as He had already blessed the ministry of His servant. Among these hymns was one he called "The Prodigal Boy." The chorus ran:

"But for one far away there remains a place,
For his father doth love him still;
And he can come back to his loving embrace,
Yes, he can come back if he will."

This hymn seemed to be peculiarly honored of heaven. The author scarcely ever sung it without seeing someone leave his sins and backslidings, and come home to God.

By and by something got in between the disciple and his Lord. Then followed a gradual loss of joy and power, later a greater drifting, and at last a heart-sickening distance from the Saviour, which the man perfectly realized in himself and which was equally manifest to others.

What bent led to the commencement of the backsliding is not known. The man may have been betrayed into the habit of scolding, fault-finding, unkind suspicion, and harsh judgment. Many go this way.

He may have unconsciously presumed on the prerogative of the Pope and became infallible. He may have spoken where God has been silent, set up a standard of Christian living according to his own ideas and notions, and insisted that his brethren adopt it or be excommunicated if not actually run out of the ministry and country for nonconformity to his opinions.

It may have been a grosser though not a more hardening sin that led him astray. Anyhow, his face clouded, his voice got rasping, his shouts ended, his songs ceased, his testimony was no more, and soon he was out of the ministry.

News came that he had taken up some kind of secular work, and then had moved to a large city. After that he was lost sight of for several years.

At this time the writer was sent to the same city as the preacher in charge of one of the churches. He was conducting a meeting in his own charge, and had a singer employed to assist him in that part of the work.

One night after the sermon had been preached, the altar call made, and many were coming forward, the leader of song, who was at the organ rendering hymn after hymn of invitation, suddenly saw Brother D., the subject of this sketch, sitting in the back seat of the crowded auditorium. The singer, whose name was R., knew D. and his history well, and seeing him thus suddenly after the lapse of years; felt like one beholding the face of a man looking at him from the crest of a sea wave, who was supposed to be at the bottom of the ocean.

Calling the writer quickly to his side R. told him that D. was present, and where he could be found. After a few moments we turned our eyes in the direction which had been whispered, and saw one of the most melancholy faces we ever beheld. The man had black hair and eyes, and possessed a striking face naturally, but the deep-settled sadness on his countenance would alone have attracted attention in any assembly. It was not simply grief that had left its stamp, but the dull, dead look of a hopeless sorrow. The initials of the man's name were S. A. D., and if ever we saw a face that measured up perfectly to these initials, it was the countenance of D., the man pointed out to us.

As we were looking at the wanderer, who had been washed up by a billow of God's providence from the great Deep of the world outside and thrown on the strand of our meeting, we noticed that R. was playing the organ with one hand and busily turning over and looking at a number of different song books that were piled up on a shelf in the instrument. At last he seemed to get the one he wanted. glancing at the title on the back we saw it was a copy of D.'s own song book.

Opening quickly at a certain page, R. deftly placed the book before him and began playing and singing "The Prodigal Boy." We never heard him sing better, and when he came to the chorus he fixed his eyes on D. and fairly poured forth the words:

"But for one far away there remains a place,
For his Father doth love him still;
And he can come back to His loving embrace,
Yes, he can come back if he will."

The instant R. began singing the hymn D. gave a sudden start, and cast a look at the singer that was indescribable in its mingled surprise, pain and despair. But R. sang on through each

stanza, and reaching the chorus he would repeat it again and again, throwing his very soul into the words, until we saw D.'s head going down, his face buried in his hands and his form shaking violently; when he suddenly arose and, almost staggering up the aisle, fell down at the altar with groan that went to every heart. The song which he had composed and had often sung with the result of bringing sinners and backsliders to salvation, had been used by the Holy Spirit to draw the author himself back to God.

R., with his face shining with joy, left the organ, ran to D., and, throwing his arms around him, wept and prayed aloud a marvelous prayer in his behalf.

D. was reclaimed that night, and before the week ended swept back into the blessing of full salvation. He then joined our church.

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Part 6

THE SNAKE-INFESTED GRAVE

From A Snake Infested Grave, hdm0553, by C. B. Jernigan

Ever and anon for some years we have heard of an infidel who lived years ago, to a ripe old age, and when he died, his grave was infested with a den of snakes. Some time ago I was holding a meeting, and this story was repeated to me, by a Nazarene preacher who had seen the grave and had killed snakes crawling over the grave. I, at once requested that I be carried out to see this notable grave. I spent half a day driving out to see the cemetery, and taking a Kodak along made the picture of the monument as you see it on the cover of this booklet.

We were told that this man especially delighted in ridiculing the Bible, calling it superstition, and ghost stories. He took special delight in deriding the story of Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the snake talking to her. He was often known to say that "any half-wit could write a more credible fairy tale than that given in the Bible. The idea of a dirty slimy snake crawling into the garden on its belly, and entering into a controversy with Eve. The most bungling blunder, of ancient Hebrew superstition, that an ugly snake could outwit a shrewd woman, and deceive her by his logic. Preposterous! Take a snake story like this to prove the authenticity of your Bible. The very first story in the book is ridiculous. I had rather have snakes crawl all over my dead body than to believe such rot." Such are the current stories about this man and his grave in the neighborhood where he lived.

Note the picture [see both hdm0553a.jpg, a drawing on the booklet cover, and hdm0553b.jpg, the picture to which C. B. Jernigan here refers] standing on a granite base fourteen feet high, with a life-size statue of the man, holding in his right hand, above his head a scroll, on which is inscribed: "UNIVERSAL MENTAL LIBERTY," lifted up. He has his left foot on the Bible, and the finger of his left hand pointed to it, on which is inscribed "SUPERSTITION." (Up with universal mental liberty, and down with the Bible.)

This monument with its statue was made by him, and erected before his death, overlooking the grave of some very devoted Christian people we are told. The picture with the snakes in it was taken by a minister, who had killed these snakes off the grave lot at the foot of this monument.

The grave lot is full of snake holes that undermine the monument, and other places on the grave lot. We saw a dead snake on the grave the cold winter day that we visited the place. The cemetery is more than one hundred years old, as we found tombs there where people were buried in 1817, and many before 1830. It is one of the most beautiful cemeteries that we have ever visited, covered with blue grass, which is kept closely mowed, and we did not find a single snake hole any where else in the whole graveyard except those on this grave.

It is currently reported that any summer day one may find snakes crawling over this grave. The snakes in the picture were all killed on the grave, on a sunny November day, and hanged on the stick leaning against the monument where the picture was made, by this minister.

* * *

In the month of March, 1930, I was assisted in a revival meeting in the great Church of the Nazarene, in East Liverpool, Ohio, by the Vaughan Radio quartet and one night in an audience of 800 I offered this book (A Snake Infested Grave) for sale, and while a member of the quartet was distributing the book through the congregation, he met a gentleman who told him that he had married the granddaughter of this noted infidel, and that he desired an interview with me.

After service, a fine looking man came up, introducing himself as Mr. B____, the manager of one of the great chain stores in the city. He said my first wife was the granddaughter of the man whose statue is on the monument on the cover page of this book. She is now dead, and is buried along side this monument. The infidel he said was a very noted character and very rich for his time, being worth at least five hundred thousand dollars. He was notorious in his hatred for the Bible; calling it a bundle of ignorance and superstition, publicly defying people to discuss the question with him. The grave lot where he was buried was on a hill side, and filled in with stones and other rubbish, and was literally a den of snakes.

The next day the Vaughan quartet drove out 40 miles to look at this monument, and the grave of this man's wife, and found it as he had said.

The next night Mr. B____ brought us a photograph of this noted character, and the next night Mr. B____ was at the altar, and was gloriously converted.

Truth is stranger than fiction.

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Part 7

HE ADMITTED HE WAS A ROGUE

From: Illustration file BAC-CUR, hdm1039

The story is told of an Italian duke who went on board a galley ship. As he passed the crew of slaves he asked several of them what their offenses were. Every one laid the blame to someone else, saying his brother was to blame or the judge was bribed. One sturdy young fellow said: "My lord, I am justly in here. I wanted money and I stole it. No one is to blame but myself." The duke on hearing this seized him by the shoulder, saying, "You rogue! What are you doing here among so many honest men? Get you out of their company!" The young fellow was then set at liberty, while the rest were left to tug at the oars.

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Part 8 HE GOT HIS BEER

From Pointed Illustrations, hdm0231, by W. M. Tidwell:

One of our young men gave me the following experience. He said, "An old gentleman and a young man, who was the driver, stopped at Ringgold, Georgia, to get a lunch. They asked for a certain type of beer. They were informed the proprietor did not have this brand; so they left the restaurant and went to another. They gave their order with the call for this same beer. On being informed that they did not have it, they left in a rage. The young man angrily said, "We will have it [calling the brand] if we have to go to hell to get it." They then drove rapidly away toward Atlanta. In making one of those curves their car collided with a beer truck loaded with the brand he had demanded, and there was a fearful wreck and crash. They were both instantly killed and buried in broken bottles of the beer the young man had demanded." He got his beer, and doubtless went to hell in so doing. Some things God will not stand for.

* * * * *

Part 9 WHAT WOULD E___ THINK?

From Illustration file BAC-CUR, hdm1039

Adoniram Judson, the illustrious American missionary, was a minister's son. He was very able and very ambitious. He was early sent to college. In the class above was a young man of the name of E., brilliant witty and popular, but a determined deist. Between him and the minister's son, there sprung up a close intimacy which ended in the latter's gradually renouncing all his early beliefs and becoming as great a skeptic as his friend. He was only twenty years of age, and you may be sure it was a terrible distress and consternation that filled the home circle when, during the recess, he announced that he was no longer a believer in Christianity. More than a match for his father's arguments, he steeled himself against all softer influences, and with his mind made up to see and enjoy the world he first, joined a company of players at New York and then set out on a solitary tour.

One night he stopped at a country inn. Lighting him to his room, the landlord mentioned that he had been obliged to place him next door to a young man who was exceedingly ill, and in all probability dying, but he hoped that it would occasion him no uneasiness. Judson assured him that beyond pity for the poor sick man he should have no feeling whatever. Still, the night proved a restless one. Sounds came from the sick chamber, sometimes the movements of the watchers; sometimes the groans of the sufferer; and the young traveler could not sleep. "So close at hand with but a thin partition between us," he thought "there is an immortal spirit about to pass into eternity; and is he prepared?"

Then he thought: "For shame of my shallow philosophy!" What would E., so clear headed and intellectual, think of this boyish weakness?" Then he tried to sleep, but still the picture of the dying man rose in his imagination. He was a young man, and the young student felt compelled to place himself on his neighbor's dying bed, and he could not help fancying what would be his thoughts in such circumstances.

Finally, the morning dawned, and in the welcome daylight his "superstitious illusions fled away." When he came downstairs, he inquired of the landlord how his fellow lodger had passed the night. "He is dead," was the answer. "Dead!" "Yes; he is gone, poor fellow; the doctor said he would not probably survive the night." "Do you know who he was?" "O yes; he was a young man from Providence college, a very fine fellow; his name was E."

Judson was completely stunned. Hours passed before he could quit the house; but when he did resume his journey, the words "Dead! Lost! Lost!" were continually ringing in his ears. There was no need for argument. God had spoken, and from the presence of the living God, the chimeras of unbelief and the pleasures of sin alike, fled away. The religion of the Bible he knew to be true; and turning his horse's head toward Plymouth, he rode slowly homeward, his plans of enjoyment all shattered, and ready to commence that rough and uninviting path which, through the death-prison at Ava and its rehearsal of martyrdom, conducted to the grave at Maulmain.

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Part 10

YOU'VE BEEN GOING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

From Illustration file SAC-ZEA, hdm1043:

[Regarding the story below, the reader is herewith advised that HDM does not endorse entertainer Pat Boone's brand of Christianity. It is a fact, however, that after beginning his singing career as nothing more than a popular singer of worldly songs he later began to move toward professed Christianity and the incorporation of Christian music into his repertoire -- a direction disdained by some. And, it is the religious direction Boone was taking in his career that was scorned in the following story. -- DVM]

Telling of his last meeting with Elvis Presley, Boon wrote: "Ironically, we met for the last time when I was going to do a show back east and he was going to Vegas. He said to me, 'Say, Pat, where are you going?' I told him where I was going and how I looked forward to being involved in

some kind of Christian ministry. He said, 'Hey, I'm going to Vegas. Pat, as long as I've known you, you've been going in the wrong direction.' I answered, 'Elvis, that just depends on where you're coming from.'

[We might also add "...and where you expect to arrive." The world thinks that Christians are heading in the wrong direction, when it is actually they who are headed wrong -- toward everlasting punishment in the lake of fire! And it appears that Elvis Presley was headed in that direction when he ended his earthly journey.]

* * * * *

Part 11 FLIGHT IS STRICTLY RESERVED FOR THE ANGELS

From Illustration file PAI-RUN, hdm1042:

A blunder was made by a bishop in 1870. While visiting a small denominational college and staying at the home of its president, he expressed the firm conviction that the Bible predicted that nothing new could be invented. The educator disagreed. "Why, in 50 years I believe it may be possible for men to soar through the air like birds!" he said. The visiting dignitary was shocked. "Flight is strictly reserved for the angels," he replied, "and I beg you not to repeat your suggestion lest you be guilty of blasphemy!" Ironically, the bishop was none other than Milton Wright, the father of Orville and Wilbur! Only 30 years later near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, they made their first flight in a heavier-than-air machine -the forerunner of the many planes that now dot our skies!

* * * * *

Part 12 PART OF THE TEXT WAS OBSCURED

From The Minister For Today (Today's Minister as God's Messenger by J. C. Himes), hdm0250:

Paul said, "But we preach Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God." Inscribed on the cornerstone of a large fashionable church was the text, "But we preach Christ crucified." As the years passed by vines grew around it until all that was visible were the words, "But we preach." Ironically, this was a sad commentary on the deteriorating ministry of that church, for the pastor spoke on other subjects without mentioning the crucified risen Saviour.

It reminds me of a statement made by the late Rev. O. G. Wilson at a ministerial institute some years ago, "A lot of preaching reminds me of the sign in the old time country store, 'Dry Goods and Notions.'" The pulpit is not for the purpose of taking advantage of someone or causing anyone to be influenced wrong.

[The above reminds me of the lettered scripture on a church sign reading: "Where There Is No Vision The People Perish," from which the "W" had fallen, making it read: "here There Is No Vision The People Perish." -- DVM]

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Part 13

THE BELL ON INCH CAPE ROCK

From the Illustration file PAI-RUN, hdm1042:

Do you remember that poem of Southey's about Sir Ralph the Rover? On the east of Scotland near Arbroath, in the old days, a good man had placed a float with a bell attached on the dangerous Inch Cape Rock, so that, the mariners hearing it, might keep away. This Sir Ralph the Rover, in a moment of deviltry, cut away the float and bell. It was a cruel thing to do.

Years passed. Sir Ralph roamed over many parts of the world. In the end, he returned to Scotland, and as he neared the coast a storm arose. Where was he? Where was the ship drifting? Oh, that he knew where he was! Oh, that he could hear the bell on the Inch cape Rock! But years ago, in his sinful folly, he, with his own hands, had cut it away.

Hark! to that grating sound, heard amid the storm, felt amid the breakers; the ship is struck; the rock penetrates her, she goes to pieces, and with curses of rage and despair the sinner's sin has found him out; he sinks to rise no more until the great day of judgment.

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Part 14

HOW THEY WERE TOWED HOME

From We'll Get To That Later, hdm0129, by Parker Maxey

While I was pastoring in the state of Montana the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) was quite active in that state. The State W.C.T.U. president lived in the town where I pastored (Sidney) and the local president of that organization was a member of my church. One time a carload of women, including these two, drove to Helena, the state capital, at the time the state legislature was in session. They went to lobby against the heavy liquor traffic in the state and to curb the sale of intoxicating beverages in every way and in every place possible. They certainly represented a just cause and were to be commended for their efforts to keep down the abominable liquor traffic.

It is a long way from Sidney to Helena with a lot of wide open country. On the way home from this meeting the ladies took a back road that passed through long stretches of sparsely inhabited country but was much shorter than the regularly traveled highway.

While the ladies were out on one of those lonely stretches and close to sunset their car stopped running and they were unable to get it started. Hardly any traffic passed that way, especially after dark. The ladies were helpless, not knowing much about the mechanical operation of an automobile. The only vehicle that came along was a beer truck driven by a young man. He stopped to give assistance. They were hesitant at first to even talk to the man but finally consented to accept help from him. He was unable to get their car running. The only way he could help them was to tie on to their car and tow them over the lonely miles of road to their home. Otherwise the ladies would be stranded, possibly all night. They accepted the young man's offer even though they were greatly chagrined to be seen coming back from an effort to curb the sale of intoxicating beverages being towed behind a beer truck! What else should or could these ladies have done?

One would be slow to fault these ladies for allowing what they did. Since they were on their way home, however, from an all-out effort to curb the horrendous liquor traffic, to allow themselves to be towed home behind a beer truck was ironical to say the least. Some may not agree with me in this but I would have to say that the offer of the young man to pull them home behind a beer truck was a trick of the devil rather than a providence of God sent along to help them. How often in life has it happened when an apparent way through a difficulty or emergency has presented itself only to be revealed that it was not of God but allowed by Him to test our integrity. The devil wouldn't like anything better than to make them dependent on a beer truck to get them home those who were in an all-out battle to stop that kind of traffic. Surely they had more than themselves to consider. Their influence opposing a wicked traffic was at stake.

Wouldn't it have been much better if these ladies would have shown a real interest in this young man by kindly and graciously thanking him personally for his concern, and for his offer to help them by towing them in, and then explained to him why they could not accept his offer? They certainly could not feel good about being towed in behind a beer truck since they were opposed to the business he was in and doing all they could to curb it. They dare not compromise their influence. They could then have kindly requested the young man to send them back help as soon as he would be able to contact help. In the meantime perhaps God would send someone else along that could help them. In any case, they would trust God for the kind of help they would feel free to accept and thus honor Him and would not embarrass themselves nor hamper the cause they represented. With this they could have assured that young man they would pray for him and hope to see him again in a different and better kind of job.

After all, there are far more important things in life when a moral issue is at stake than even our physical comfort and safety (Matthew 10:39).

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Part 15
DIVINE IRONICAL JUDGMENTS

This is Chapter 15 from the book, Revival Incidents, hdm0048, by Beverly Carradine:

Many times in the study of the Scriptures, and in the observation of human affairs about us, I have been struck with the peculiar retributive nature of God's judgments, and what I would call the irony of the Divine Providence.

As the Sodomites burned in their sins, and burned to sin, so they were burned in their sins and for their sins. As the Israelites craved flesh at any cost, they got it in such quantities that it came out of their nostrils.

The Jews cried out for Barabbas and chose a robber instead of Christ. For nearly two thousand years they have been without Christ and if ever a people have been robbed they have, and if ever a people know how to rob in business, they do. Barabbas has been ruling over them for twenty centuries. "Now Barabbas was a robber."

There is an irony today that is easily beheld in our church windows. Experimental piety has been laughed at, the witness of the Spirit denied, genuine revivals withstood, prevented, and ridiculed, all manifestations of spiritual joy frowned upon and responses of a voluntary nature from the audience literally frozen out and up. So that the place such churches have been obviously heading for as a congregational procession has at last been reached. They have landed in something like a graveyard. The preacher himself dresses, looks and often talks like an undertaker. I have known a number of them when giving directions from the pulpit to the janitor and ushers, to throw their voices in the very pits of their stomachs and say in deep sepulchral notes, "The janitor will lower the windows, "in the same tone and manner that an undertaker says to his assistants, "You will now lower the body in the grave."

As for the appearance of many congregations, they have been drilled and schooled to look as impassive and irresponsive as corpses. It is now "A congregation of the dead" as the Bible says.

As for the windows, in pursuance of the death and burial idea, they have become in many places memorial tablets and remind one with their sentences "Sacred to the memory," of head-stones in the cemetery. The irony of the great judgment has come. Many churches have landed where they headed, in a graveyard.

The irony is beheld at work in the lives of individuals.

In one of our western states there was a preacher who in the effort to drive out holiness from the district in which he was presiding elder, preached himself out of his own religious experience. He became so lifeless and dead that no district circuit or station wanted him, and so he had to take up secular pursuits for a living.

Some years ago I met him on the streets of Philadelphia peddling something in a tin can. We asked him what it was and he told us it was "embalming fluid."

I had the greatest difficulty in keeping my face straight on the reception of this information. Here was a grim fitness of things indeed. He had abused, scolded and fought in his church until

everything was dead in his pastorate, and he more lifeless than all, and now he was engaged in selling "embalming fluid" for the use of corpses."

When he, in telling me his occupation, began to enlarge upon the merits of the embalming fluid, how natural it would make the dead look, and how long it would preserve the bodies as nice looking corpses, I could not trust myself to look in his face for fear of laughter.

Of course he was in a legitimate business and a most appropriate one; for after killing, the next imperative thing to do would be to preserve the bodies of the slain.

A full year after this I was made acquainted with a third step in this preacher's life. Asking a cousin of the man how our embalming brother was getting on, she informed me that he had recently changed his business and was now selling a disinfectant oil!

As she told me, it was simply impossible to keep from laughing. Here was not only the irony of circumstance dealing with the man, but a progressive order of events so eminently and so satirically fitting as would make the very Sphinx of Egypt smile.

The man first filled the church with spiritually dead people. Second he got to embalming. Third as the days went by and putrefaction took place, the preserving business had to be laid aside and our active brother ever ready to accommodate himself to new situations and conditions immediately engaged in the benevolent labor of presenting to and urging upon the people a mixture of fumigating and disinfecting nature guaranteed to do a perfect work.

Again I beheld the irony of fate in the project of an unspiritual and unblessed clergyman who had a fountain erected just back of his pulpit. Perhaps he realized in a misty way that there ought to be something of the kind in a moral and spiritual line in the church, and as he failed to grasp the idea that he was the spiritual well that God desired should overflow with streams of living water upon the souls of the people, then there seemed nothing left him to do but to introduce a leaden pipe under the floor, connect it with the city water works, and cause it to flash and play and sparkle in a marble bowl that stood near the sacred desk.

Still again I saw the irony of a retributive judgment of God on a preacher who especially resented and fought the Bible presentation of inbred sin under the figure or symbol of "Flesh."

This I have observed, that no matter who the man is and how he opposes holiness, it is only a question of time when he is left with nothing but a memory as to religious experience. If a preacher, his unction, liberty, power, all leave him and he never has another genuine Holy Ghost revival. Now as preaching without the Spirit of God in the heart is an uphill work attended with a downhill life, the great body of such ministers go to lecturing instead of preaching the gospel, and many finally return to secular pursuits.

The man who so fought and derided the Bible figure of "Flesh," was driven to find work, and the only employment he could obtain was in a butcher shop where at last accounts he was cutting flesh, sawing flesh, weighing flesh, handling flesh and literally living in piles and stacks of flesh.

A final instance I remember is that of a pastor who commenced a warfare against holiness in his church and especially against a holiness preacher who had introduced it in his community.

He never rested until he formed such a combination against the man of God that the preacher was tried and ultimately driven from his annual conference.

Then God proceeded to try the persecutor of His servant. And he was ejected from a holier council than an annual conference. He lost fellowship with the Trinity.

But this did not stop him. His remaining friends told him that he was hurting himself with the community, injuring his own interest and acting like a cabbage head so far as sound sense and judgment was concerned.

But he insisted that the others were the cabbage heads and raged on until he was left not only without a religious experience, but without a pastoral charge.

He went into a secular pursuit for living and the reader will be compelled to smile when we reveal the nature of his work.

He went to raising cabbages for a living!

I have wondered if when standing in his six-acre field and looking at the long rows of cabbage heads disappearing in the distance, if he does not think of another cabbage head that was situated above and just between his two shoulders.

It is easy for God to humiliate and bring into an open shame those who oppose Him and resist His work and truth.

The Philistines laughed at God's ark on the ox cart, but he made them all sick and put the last one into bed. He turned their laughter into groaning.

There are many hands lifted, tongues moving and pens stabbing at God's servants today, who are being honored of heaven wherever they go. According to the Bible, trouble, shame and humiliation is certainly ahead of them and coming to meet them. He that said touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm, knows how to perfectly deliver His servants and bring a confusion, reproach and defeat upon their enemies as completely manifest to all, as anything ever beheld in life or described in the pages of Scripture.

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Part 16

THE IMPRESSION MADE BY HIS CHIMNEY

From Pen Pictures, hdm0045, by Beverly Carradine

On being sent to a certain church when the writer was in the itinerant connection, one of the first persons to greet and fairly bubble over upon him was the subject of this sketch. In spite of the fervent welcome, however, the impression made upon the preacher was not of the most desirable character. There was a strange inward shrinking from the bland and verbose personage before him.

The first thing that struck the pastor in the new acquaintance, was that he was over-anxious to please. Of course we owe to one another kind and courteous treatment in this world, and the gentleness, considerateness and politeness are mighty instruments for doing good, and even in spreading the Gospel among the nations. But this man was too bland and kind, and too smiley and gushy for his own good, and for the securing of the best regard in the minds and hearts of his fellow creatures. He was so over-assiduous to please that he failed to please and aroused suspicions instead in regard to his motives and character, like some preachers all have known who have forgotten the exalted character of their calling, ceased to bear themselves as ambassadors from the Court of Heaven, and degenerated into the spirit, practice, wiles, tricks, stereotyped smirk and perpetual handshake of the politician.

A handshake can be made a means of grace; but we have seen it drift with some men entirely into the mechanical realm, and the flying arms of a pastor had no more love, grace and unction in their manipulation, than exists in the canvas-covered limbs of a whirling windmill. Kindness and love are all right: but evident over-anxiousness to please defeats the very object that the mind has in view.

Bro. Sandford was too bubbly. He ran after his game too fast and hard. He tried to appear fond, when he really fawned. He overdid the thing, and became too sweet. He was sickening sweet.

A second fact that impressed itself on the writer about Bro. Sandford was, that whenever he spoke to him he would place his hand by the side of his mouth so as to fence off his breath from the minister.

At first it was regarded as a mere habit. Later the charitable supposition was that the brother might have been breakfasting or dining on onions, and did not desire his preacher to be regaled with the strong odor of that Egyptian vegetable. But one day Bro. Sandford forgot to study which way the wind was blowing, at the same time in the eagerness of his conversation neglected to raise his breath shield, in the shape of his hand, and the consequence was that the pastor received into his astonished and shocked face an overpowering puff of whisky-laden atmosphere!

A third occurrence in this strange life about this time was the blowing down of one of Bro. Sandford's chimneys by a high wind one night. The reader well knows the peculiar shape of a side chimney in many houses. It would be hard to find anything in brick architecture that looks more like a large whisky bottle. As the chimney in question had stood for years protecting a certain amount of the dwelling from the effect of the sun, wind and weather, of course when it fell with a crash in the yard, it left its own shape and image as if painted in the most unmistakable way against the end of the building. It was plainly visible to all who looked, and everybody seemed to behold it, and everybody was smiling, or laughing outright, about this wind cartoon, this ironical conduct of the storm.

One man said as he looked at the large sign of the bottle against the house, "Be sure you sin will find you out."

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Part 17
A MOVING STORY

From The Voice of God, hdm0551, by Paul Frederick Elliott:

[This moving story was inserted into P. F. Elliott's book as Chapter 8, but it was not written by him. He does not show the author, and at the close of the story, its source is merely shown as "Selected". -- DVM]

A most touching incident occurred here last Sunday in a church. Two young men tramps, who were dressed in rags, were brought back to the fold of Christ. How God led them there, and their dear old mother together in church at this meeting, and how they fell in each other's arms, was the most touching thing I ever saw.

About one block below our place of business stands the church. It is a large and handsome building, far more beautiful on the inside than on the outside. This church, seating about one thousand people, with the gallery, was filled to the utmost last Sunday (January 26, 1895). The audience was composed of all, classes of people, both rich and poor, God-fearing and ungodly people.

As in all great revivals, many came only for curiosity's sake, and others to point the finger of scorn and to scoff. Those who have wandered far away from the fold of God have become His meek followers, and now dare to face old friends and testify in unmistakable words of Christ's wonderful saving power. The Holy Spirit has always, in time past, and will in the future, use such incidents as that which took place here, which almost compel sinners to feel themselves lost, and make them cry aloud to God for mercy. It was the most heart-touching scene I ever saw.

Even now, although it is past, it comes to memory time and again. They brush aside every obstacle and fill my eyes. But I am thankful to God that I was there, because it has drawn me closer to Him. It has strengthened my faith in Him most wonderfully that He is able to save to the utmost, and no man, however low he has fallen in sin, no matter how far he has wandered away from God, need despair.

How many have shaken their heads and said, "It's no use to pray for such men, as they have sinned until their hearts are so hard that God Himself is not able to move them." But, thanks be to God, such was proven not true by the case of these two tramps. I will tell you now about it.

As I said, the church was full, and these tramps were dressed in rags. One arose to his feet. By his clothes you could readily tell what manner of life he lived. There was deep silence all over the church. We could hear the clock tick. It seemed as though we were all holding our breath. But

when we looked into his face we could read that Jesus had possession of the man, and could tell at a glance that a great change had taken place in his heart.

He was a handsome young man, about five feet and ten inches high, high forehead, dark hair and eyes, and about twenty years of age. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. At first his voice seemed choked, and he could hardly speak; but as he kept on his voice grew stronger and stronger. Toward the close he became eloquent. We all could see he was an educated man, and could have listened to him another hour. My eyes seemed not to be my own; even so with the rest. Handkerchiefs were used by the strongest men as he continued to speak.

He said if ever a person had reason to be thankful it was he. He said:

"Although you see me clad in rags, I am a most happy man -- happier than any millionaire or king up on his throne, because God has come to me and my brother and forgiven our sins. He has made new men out of us. He has taken, or, better said, snatched us off the road that leads to damnation, and placed us in the road that leads to a useful life, and at last to a life everlasting.

"It seems more as if we had just arisen from an awful dream than that it should be something real. No greater sinner than I ever lived. My father and mother lived ten miles from Nashville, on the Gallatin pike, on a small farm. Father and mother were the best parents a boy ever had. It was their desire that we two should have a good education, and they worked hard to help us, never seeming to become weary.

"They sent me to Nashville, to Scott University, to study law. They often spoke of the joy it would be to them to see me rise higher and higher in public life. Four years they sent me to school. Money gave out, and in order that I might finish my studies they mortgaged their farm, and sent me two hundred dollars more.

"A short time after I entered college I fell in with a lot of companions who walked not in the ways of God, and made light of my father's and mother's religion. At first I would not listen to them, but at last I yielded, and from that time I date it that I started on the downward path. I also became a scoffer at religion. I soon started to drink and gamble. I was found in company where no man should be.

"I first went about in my sinful ways shyly, but grew more and more bold in sinning. I have seen one of my companions die of delirium tremens, another killed in a drunken fight, and another commit suicide when he realized that his life was a wreck. I was shunned by everybody, and ashamed to meet my dear old mother and father and ask forgiveness.

"I started the life of a tramp again until last Friday. As about seven of us tramps were sitting about the campfire, another tramp came up to us. We were glad to see him come, as he had something to eat, which we all ate heartily. Why it was, I know not, but I took a special liking to the newcomer.

"As we were talking of different things, each boasting of what he had already done, each trying to outdo the other in telling of shameful acts, this newcomer of ours told us how nicely he had fooled his old mother. With an oath, he said he would never be a preacher.

"He said: 'Wesley Crockett will never be a preacher. That is for people who are soft-minded, and men who are more women than men. But I fooled the old woman. But boys,' he added, 'she was the best woman that ever lived; I have often wished I could do her a favor now and then.' And with his dirty, ragged sleeves he would wipe away tear after tear.

"We were all touched by the word 'mother.' Then one after the other would tell of his good mother; and these hard-hearted men would turn their heads to one side, so that they could not see each other's tears that had gathered in their eyes. This newcomer seemed to be the most tender-hearted, and when I heard him mention his name I began to take a special interest in him.

"I asked him if that was his name -- Wesley Crockett. He said it was. I told him that Crockett was my name; I handed over for a shake, and as we shook hands I thought he was my own brother. I asked him if he had a brother by the name of Daniel. He said he had. 'He was about five years older than I. But he left home some five or six years ago. My father loved him, and sent him to college, and mortgaged his farm to raise money so he could finish his studies. But Daniel, my brother, broke his heart, and it killed him at last. But he told us before he died, if we saw Daniel, to tell him that his father forgave him. Those were the last words he spoke. And,' he said, lowering his voice, 'as mean as Brother Daniel was to father, I have been to mother.'

"I now realized that this stranger, who was also a tramp, was nobody but my brother. I tried to keep back, but could not. I said, 'I am Daniel,' and cried aloud, 'Brother, brother!' We then fell on each other's necks and wept like children. When we got to ourselves again, and looked around, we were all alone -- the rest had left.

"Brother had studied for the ministry. He said we were like the prodigal son -- we had sinned against Heaven and against father and mother. He told me the story of the prodigal son. When he finished the story he said, 'Let us ask God to forgive these great sins of ours, brother.'

"Then he told me one Bible verse after another, which we applied to ourselves. We stayed on our knees and prayed to God until God left His glorious light of forgiveness of sin shining deep into those black hearts of ours."

Here the speaker broke down and wept like a child. The congregation was deeply moved. As he sat down, an old lady dressed in a thin calico dress came in and sat down in the back part of the church.

The younger brother got up next. He was equally handsome as his brother Daniel. He started to tell us how he had wandered away from God, and how he had sinned against Heaven and parents. He told us of the grandmother he had, and how she sacrificed everything so that he could go to college and study for the ministry. He continued:

"As my brother told you, father mortgaged his farm to raise money in order to let brother finish his education. After he saw how brother was living, and that he had left, not knowing where, it grieved him that he was soon brought to his grave. But his love for Daniel never ceased.

"After father died, mother paid all she could. The farm was sold by the man who had the mortgage, and we were turned out into the world. But dear old mother never lost faith in God. She said to me, 'God leadeth us at times in mysterious ways, but at the end all will be well.'

"It was her and father's, and my own, desire that I should go to college and study for the ministry. I gave myself to Him in my early youth, and now I make another vow to go out and preach the Gospel of the blessed Savior to the lost sinner.

"We moved to Nashville. One day mother told me to write to the president of the college and tell him how I was situated, and what I wanted to study for, and ask him if there was any way that a poor boy could go to college and study. I received an answer that I could earn my education by doing all manner of work about the college, but that I must board somewhere else.

"When I read the letter to mother she said, 'The Lord has opened a way already. We will move into yonder log house, near the college, and I will take in washing and sewing, and you can take your meals and sleep at home.' So I went to college. The boys would make all manner of fun at my patched pants. But I could tell them I was proud of those patches, because mother made them.

"One time a gold medal was to be awarded to the best orator in college. I took part. Mother helped me all she could. When the judges decided who was to get the medal, to my astonishment it was presented to me. But I thought it belonged to mother, and not to me, so I walked down the aisle to the last seat, where mother sat, and put it about her neck, saying, 'Mother, you earned this; you shall have it.'

"Yes, I loved my mother and she loved me. But in an hour of great temptation I fell. I had disgraced myself, and did not feel worthy of the high calling for which I was studying, and was wondering how I could face the Christian mother. Others who fell with me were making preparations to run away that very evening. I was not myself any longer, and I went with them.

"We then roamed from one place to another. We took to eating whatever we could find or lay our hands on. My heart grew harder and harder. That tender love for mother was gone, and I became a mocker and scoffer at religion.

"One day a wonderfully strong feeling came over me. Something seemed to drive me away from my companions. I wanted to be alone. I thought of my dear old mother, and something told me that mother was praying for me. So I broke away from the boys and roamed and tramped about until I met Brother Daniel.

"He told you what happened then. When we arose from our knees I said, 'Dan, let's hunt mother, if she is living. I want to see her.' We went to the old log house where mother and I had lived. We asked the nearest neighbor if he knew where we could find mother. He told a most pitiful story. He told us that from the time I ran away mother never gave her boys up as lost. She

had said, 'As a shepherd I will seek for my boys.' They tried to persuade her not to go, as she was old and feeble, and had no money to travel with. But she said she must go.

So she started out on foot, and has walked many and many a weary mile, and slept many nights under the clear heavens when there was no house near by, no kind people to offer her shelter. But she came back now and then, and asked if her boys had not come back, or if the neighbors had heard anything of them. She has not given up yet, they tell me. She believes God will bring back her boys."

The man cried aloud, and begged as I never before heard anybody:

"Oh, is there anybody here today who knows where mother is? Tell her Mrs. Crockett's own two boys are saved -- that her prodigal sons have returned."

Just then the little woman who had come into church dressed in a thin calico dress, and had taken the last seat as the first brother finished speaking, cried out, "God answers prayers." The younger brother said out loud; "Dan, it's mother." "Mother, Mother!" they both cried.

They ran to meet her; then they fell on each other's necks and wept -- the boys dressed in rags, the mother poorly clad, but rejoicing because God answers prayers.

I never saw such a sight in all my life. Men who you would think could not cry wept like little children. And such feelings! I never saw any thing so touching. Many who had come for fun were now down on their knees pleading with God to have mercy on them.

Oh, I wish I could tell it so that you could all understand it as I saw it.

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Part 18

HAVE YOU BEEN STRUCK BY A CRUEL IRONY,
A SEEMINGLY MERCILESS TWIST OF FATE?

If so, read this, from Consolation, hdm0193, by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman:

It is a most blessed experience to have the conscious presence of God with us through the trials and tests of life. But it is another thing when the Father apparently abandons us to fate in the storms of life; when He seems to have utterly forgotten us;

"When sorrows fall like rain, and troubles swarm like bees about the hive,"

"When our ships at sea come drifting home, with broken masts and sails,"

"When we groan and writhe beneath our crosses,"

"When He plants our path thick with thorns,"

"When our feet are cut with sharp rocks as we climb the hill difficulty,"

"When He loads our back heavy with burdens,"

"When He wrests from our arms whatever we love."

But had we no tests, no great hedged -- in experiences, we should never know the wonderful Deliverer and triumphant Guide we have. His eye is upon us. He is working out some infinite purpose. Let us say as did Job: "He knoweth the way that I take, when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

In a certain old town was a great cathedral. And in that cathedral was a wondrous stained glass window. Its fame had gone abroad over the land. From miles around people pilgrimaged to gaze upon the splendor of this masterpiece of art. One day there came a great storm. The violence of the tempest forced in the window and it crashed to the marble floor, shattered into a hundred pieces. Great was the grief of the people at the catastrophe which had suddenly bereft the town of its proudest work of art. They gathered up the fragments, huddled them in a box, and carried them to the cellar of the church. One day there came along a stranger and craved permission to see the beautiful window. They told him of its fate. He asked what they had done with the fragments. And they took him to the vault and showed him the broken morsels of glass. "Would you mind giving these to me?" said the stranger. "Take them along," was the reply, "they are no longer of any use to us." And the visitor carefully lifted the box and carried it away in his arms. Weeks passed by; then one day there came an invitation to the custodians of the cathedral. It was from a famous artist, noted for his master-skill in glass-craft. It summoned them to his study to inspect a stained glass window, the work of his genius. Ushering them into his studio he stood them before a great veil of canvass. At the touch of his hand upon a cord the canvass dropped. And there before their astonished gaze shone a stained glass window surpassing in beauty all their eyes had ever beheld. As they gazed entranced upon its rich tints, wondrous patterns, and cunning workmanship the artist turned and said: "This window I have wrought from the fragments of your shattered one, and it is now ready to be replaced." Once more a great window shed its beauteous light into the dim aisles of the old cathedral. But the splendor of the new far surpassed the glory of the old, and the fame of its strange fashioning filled the land.

Do you say that your plans have been crushed? Have joy and sweetness vanished from life? Does there seem nought left for you but to walk its weary treadmill until its days of darkness and drudgery shall end? Then know this. Jesus Christ is a matchless life mender. Try Him. He will take that seemingly shattered life and fashion a far more beautiful one from its fragments than you yourself could ever have wrought from the whole. In Him your weary soul shall find its longed-for rest. And the fragments that remain of God's heritage of life to you shall mean in gladsome days to come, more than all the vanished years that are crooning their sad lament in your innermost soul tonight. -- James McConkey

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THE END