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OLD TIME RELIGION

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INTRODUCTION

"'Tis the old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

"It was tried in the fiery furnace,
And it's good enough for me.

"And 'twas tried in a den of lions,
And it's good enough for me.

"Yes, 'twas tried by the faithful martyrs,
And it's good enough for me.

"It was good for my mother,
And it's good enough for me.

"And 'twas good enough for father,
And it's good enough for me.

"It makes me love all my neighbors,
And it's good enough for me.

"It prepares my soul for glory,
And it's good enough for me.

"It will make me shout when dying,
And it's good enough for me."

* * * * *

01 -- THE MEETING HOUSE

The old time Meeting House on the hill, surrounded by a grove of beautiful trees, near a bubbling spring which flowed from under a big rock, occupies a conspicuous place in the heart of sacred memories.

It was not a modernized cathedral, with high steeple and arched domes, lettered windows and cushioned pews, pipe organ and gallery. Neither was it a costly edifice, fashioned after the latest and most improved architectural designs, hopelessly in debt, built principally from a sense of pride and personal ambition in order to attract the eye and command the admiration of a world-loving, pleasure-seeking, Christless public; but it was a plain, one room, log meeting house, where the people of the neighborhood met at stated times to worship God.

It's site was ideal; on a high hill, just beyond grandfather's house, in a thick grove, near a beautiful creek, in the center of the neighborhood. Grandfather gave the land, five acres, without the insertion of a reverting clause in the deed, to the trustees of the church several years ago.

The water supply did not come from a cistern, nor an artesian well, but from a natural, never-failing, big spring at the foot of the hill, which flowed from under a massive, moss-covered ledge of rocks, and was as cold in the summer as it was in the winter, and as abundant in the dry as in the rainy season.

The house was square, built of logs about ten inches in diameter, hewn flat on opposite sides, and notched together at the corners so that the cracks between the logs in the walls of the building were not more than an inch or two inches wide. These cracks were chinked up with pieces of boards and daubed tightly with mud.

The rafters and lathing were made of pine poles, six inches in diameter, and the roof of boards, three feet long, riven in the forest with frow and mallet, by the neighbors who built the house years ago. Nails were too expensive to use when a substitute would answer the purpose as well, so instead of nailing the boards in the roof, they were laid in position, and each row held in place by a long, heavy pole being placed upon it, the same as spring-houses and potato banks were covered.

The house had but one door and that faced the pulpit, and but one window and that was behind the pulpit. These two openings furnished all the light and ventilation the people had during meetings.

No stove, but a big fire place in a stone chimney, on the preacher's right side as he faced the congregation, was used to heat the house for meetings during cold weather.

The benches were made of logs, about eight inches in diameter, cut the proper length, split in the middle and hewn smooth on the flat side, with two two-inch auger holes bored opposite each other, at an angle perhaps of sixty degrees, about two feet from the end, on the round side of the slab-shaped piece of timber. Saplings two and three inches in diameter were chopped down and cut into pieces, the length of the spoke of a wagon wheel, four of which, whittled at one end to fit the auger holes, were driven into each half log, for legs, and then the bench was turned over, complete, and ready for use.

The pulpit resembled a wheat-bin in grandfather's old granary. It was a big, strong box, eight feet long, five feet wide, and four feet high, all ceiled up as tight as a northern house, except one end, which was left open for the preacher to go in and come out.

Just behind the church in the grove, enclosed by a stone wall three and a half feet high, was a spot of ground which lay near the heart of almost every person in the whole community -- for in there the precious remains of many a loved one were carefully deposited awaiting the sounding of Gabriel's trumpet.

Such was the old time Meeting House with its surroundings. The people loved the house. They loved the grounds. They rejoiced exceedingly when the meeting day came. They felt like relatives when they met at the church, and were sad when the hour for parting came. How precious these old scenes and occasions! How fresh and sweet their memories still! Who could forget them! Who would forget them! God bless the recollections of the dear old Meeting House on the hill!

* * * * *

02 -- THE PREACHER

The old time preacher!

What a picture!

How clear he stands in memory's view, even the cut of his coat, the size of his hat, the color of his hair, the length of his beard, the name of his horse!

There was a blessing in his presence and power in his words. His periodical visits, though separated from us by many years and more cares, inspire us yet.

While riding along the public road on his big sorrel horse, going from one appointment to another, or visiting from house to house among his parishioners, a view of the old time preacher deeply impressed the people who were at work in their fields, or who saw him pass their homes. Frequently they would stop work and gaze after him as long as glimpses of his departing form was visible in the road over the hill. While looking upon that man of God, many questions concerning him and his life arose in mind, such as:

What is he thinking about? How does he feel? Did he ever commit sin when a boy? How much nearer is God to him than to ordinary people? Does the devil dare to tempt him? Will he be translated like Enoch and Elijah?

It meant something for good in the grand old days for a preacher just to ride through a neighborhood.

The old time preacher, approaching the meeting house to fill his monthly appointment formed a picture which, for interest and impressiveness, deserves a central position in the hall of sacred memories.

His appearance was made about the time the congregation gathered and services should begin. Many eyes were watching for him.. As soon as he was discovered, coming over the hill, the words, "He's coming; he's coming," were so rapidly passed from one to another that within a very few moments the whole congregation knew that the preacher was in sight. Everybody smiled for joy. Expressions of delight were heard from all directions.

As he drew nearer, a number of men, pillars of the church, started to meet him. By the time he reached the hitching grove in front of the church, his horse was literally surrounded by a crowd of happy-hearted, shining-faced brethren, all eager to say "Howdy" to the preacher. Before dismounting he shook hands with a large number of people, for whose souls he had come to break the bread of life.

This meeting and greeting of pastor and people resembled that of a returning father, who had left his precious wife and three sweet children, to struggle with poverty, for a space of four years, while he went to California in search of gold in order to purchase a little home for himself and family.

Every man wanted to hitch the preacher's horse. There was a blessing in even that. And everyone wanted to carry his saddle-bags, which contained a Bible and a hymn book, to the church. There was rich reward in that service also.

The preacher, surrounded by the men who had gone to meet him, and, walking slowly toward the church, with his well-worn overcoat lying across his left arm, and his hat in his left hand, met and shook hands with nearly all the men and boys on the ground, while the women and girls were already seated in the church.

The slow, majestic, reverent manner in which he entered the house, and knelt in silent prayer, made the people feel that they were in the presence of a holy man of God.

The women were seated on the left and the men on the right side of the pulpit. They all knew and kept their places.

The preacher in the pulpit, although almost entirely hidden from view by the front side of the stand which he occupied, made lasting impressions upon the mind, while many other things, of probably much more importance, seen and heard long since that time, may have faded entirely from memory's view.

Ah, that preacher looked like a saint, ready for translation to glory. He looked like he knew God personally, and that he had had a long, soul communication with Him before entering the pulpit. He looked like an heir, not of this world, but of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." God's peace was glowing in his face.

No man ever felt the weight and worth of immortal souls more than did that dear man of God. For their salvation, he prayed fervently and labored faithfully both day and night.

God's awful reproof of, and judgments pronounced against the shepherds of Israel, in the following language, were never meant for our preacher:

"Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

"Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock.

"The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

"And the were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.

"My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

"Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord;

"As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock;

"Therefore, oh ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord;

"Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them." -- Ezekiel 34:2-10.

The old time preacher did not lack for an invitation to dinner. As soon as the benediction was pronounced, many surrounded the pulpit for the purpose of extending such invitation. His great heart, like a father's for his children, was full of love for all the people. How was he to decide where to go, when so many invitations were given, and all at the same time? Very easily, for he inquired, "Is any sick among you?" Learning the condition of the health of each family, he then asked himself the question, "Where am I needed most?" The answer determined the place he was to dine that day.

The preacher in the homes of his people was truly remarkable. He did not seem to know anything about political platforms, tariff measures, war issues, prize fights, and the like, for such subjects were not mentioned during his visit. He asked the number in family, the name and age of each, and if all the children who had crossed the line of accountability had been converted. He then asked about the spiritual condition of each Christian in the family, and also about their habits of Bible reading, family and secret prayer.

The preacher, having informed himself fully on all these important subjects, called the family together and taking a seat near the center of the room, took the old family Bible and read a lesson, explaining and commenting as he went, every word fitting the case of some one who heard it, and then prayed. WHAT A PRAYER!

It seemed like heaven and earth and angels and men were coming together during the prayer. Surely the skies came down and the earth went up.

The father, the mother, and each child was committed separately to the tender mercies and loving care of the heavenly Father.

During the prayers, people felt like they could endure anything for Jesus, and that they would never want to do wrong again. Yea, they felt like the everlasting arms of Jehovah were under them and lifting them toward the golden gates of the New Jerusalem..

The circuits were so large and had so many preaching places and so many homes to visit, that the pastor could not call on the same family, ordinarily, more than two or three times a year, but the influence of his presence, and the power of his prayer, never died during his absence.

It was like being at church, only more so, to have the preacher in the home.

How tenderly and yet how impressively, he laid his precious hand upon the heads of the children, while in a few well chosen words their whole lives were committed to God !

That old time preacher was not distinguished from other men by the title of "Dr." or "Rev." only, but by his piety among, and power for good over men.

Why, there was power in his walk, power in his look, power in the expression of his face, power in the shake of his hand, power in his voice, and power in his presence.

Paul evidently told our preachers experience as well as his own when he said:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live;. yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loveth me and gave Himself for me." Gal. 2:20.

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom.. 8:38,39.

* * * * *

03 -- THE PREACHING

Either the preaching in other days was different from what it is now, or the people were in a better condition to hear and receive the Word of God than they are at this day and time.

Preaching then convinced the people mightily that they were sinners, lost and on their way to hell, and that nothing but a heart transformed by grace, and made anew, could keep them out of the bottomless pit.

There was no doubt about the preacher's belief in the whole Bible. Hearing him preach a single sermon convinced the people that he believed with all of his heart, and felt with all of his being, that there was, is, and will ever be a personal God and a personal Devil, a literal heaven for the righteous and a literal hell for the wicked.

There was no speculation, no theorizing, no star measurements, no attempt to please and entertain the intellect, nor effort to reach an oratorical climax; but the Word, as preached, was plain, simple direct, powerful, soul-reaching, soul-searching, and soul-moving; it was quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow," and proved a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

God, heaven, the angels, the redeemed, the devil, hell, the lost, the judgment, eternity, and the broad and narrow ways were pictured by the words of the preacher as if he saw them with his natural eyes.

Sin was uncovered. The devil was unmasked. Hell was uncapped. The black smoke and blue flame were almost visible. The weeping and the wailing of the lost could almost be heard.

No time was devoted to lecturing on "catchy" subjects, nor attempts to reconcile recent scientific discoveries with revelation, nor efforts to prove the existence of pre-historic races of man. The theme of every discourse was, PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD!

Man, as a free moral agent before his maker, rapidly hastening from the cradle to the grave, responsible for his thoughts, his words, his actions and his influence to his God, and having soon to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to "receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad," with heaven open above him, and hell yawning beneath him, was made to realize his condition as he listened to the Word of Truth.

It may not be said that the preaching was either textual, or topical, but it was exhortative; coming from the heart of the preacher and directed to the hearts of the hearers.

It was not "with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." God was in it. The Son was in it. The Holy Ghost was in it.

It did not sound as if the preacher had paid a fee of \$25.00 to some college to confer a distinguishing title upon him, but it did sound as if he had tarried and tarried and tarried -- in an upper room, or behind a stump, or in a fence corner, or out in the field, or over the hill, until he had received "the promise of the Father," "Endowment with power from on high," the gift of the Holy Ghost."

The effect of the preaching on the congregation was remarkable. Under the power of the Holy Spirit some cried, some laughed, some moaned and some shouted, some clapped their hands and some stamped the floor with their feet. The gospel reached the hearts of the people.

Results were visible. Such scenes and feelings can not be forgotten while memory survives.

The preacher was not disturbed in his discourse by crying children, falling rain, nor barking dogs. His being was buried in his theme. He saw and felt the certain doom of the wicked, and his whole soul was consumed in burning anxiety to rescue them from the "fire prepared for the devil and his angels." He lost sight of all minor things reaching for souls.

The effect of the preaching was not spasmodic; it did not wear off as the benediction was being pronounced; it remained in the heart, and made itself visible in the countenance, heard in the words and felt in the presence of the people who sat "under the drippings of the sanctuary."

The good preaching was not all done by regularly licensed and ordained preachers during former days.

A custom, as common then as it is uncommon now, was for the preacher to invite into the pulpit with him an exhorter, or some other man accustomed to "exercising in public," whose eyes, during the sermon, were filled with tears, and whose approval of the discourse was frequently and enthusiastically expressed in words, such as "Amen!" "Hallelujah!" "Praise the Lord!" "Glory."

The sermon closed with a request for the brother occupying a seat in the stand to conclude. He was on his feet before the preacher had time to take his seat, and, beginning where the discourse ended which was somewhere near the gate of glory, he exhorted for eight or ten minutes. His words were full of pathos, power, and earnestness. Hearts were touched, and the people moved under the appeals of truth which fell from his consecrated lips.

Whether or not this would be counted good preaching now, it was good, effective, and lasting in its results then.

Another important feature of the preaching then was, it reached all classes of people and almost every person in the classes: the old, the middle-aged, the young and even the children.

There were but few people in all the neighborhood whose lives were not influenced to some extent by the preaching of the gospel.

"Thy word, Almighty Lord,
Where'er it enters in,
Is sharper than a two-edged sword,
To slay the man of sin.

"Thy word is power and life;
It bids confusion cease,
And changes envy, hatred, strife,
To love, and joy and peace.

"Then let our heart's obey

The gospel's glorious sound;
And all its fruits from day to day,
Be in us and abound."

* * * * *

04 -- THE PEOPLE

The people of former times were plain, and their habits and customs were simple. Living was easy and life enjoyable. Farming was the principal occupation and not very much of that was done.

Corn, wheat, oats and vegetables were the staples. The wheat was sown broadcast with the hand, plowed under with a one horse, mule or ox plow, harvested with a sickle and thrashed with a flail. There were no binders, cultivators, thrashing-machines, nor improved farming implements then as now. Everything was done by hand. It went slow, but nothing better was known.

The people did not work hard. Yet they had plenty. A little went long way and nothing was wasted.

The houses were small, made of the same material and after the same fashion as the old Meeting House told about in Chapter 1. They had, as a rule, but one room, which was used as a kitchen, dining-room, bedroom and parlor. Once in a while one of these houses was provided with a loft, in which the boys slept during the summer time.

The women worked harder and did more of it than the men. They worked all the time. The men worked when they pleased or felt like it. Men worked in the field only. Women worked in the field and also in the house. The men, returning from the field, rested; while the women returning, continued their work.

After making hands in the field with their husbands and brothers, the women, at night, on rainy days and during leisure seasons, carded the wool and cotton into rolls, spun the rolls into thread, wove the thread into cloth, and then cut and made the cloth into garments, making everything that the whole family wore, from stockings to suspenders. Bed clothing was made in the same way.

There were no sewing machines, cook stoves, cook books nor washing machines. All the work was done by hand.

The families were large, but not quarrelsome. Each respected and loved all the others. Strong cords of devotion bound them together. The father was King, the mother was Queen. The children were ready to die, if need be, for the honor of their parental rulers.

The mill, store and post-office were all several miles away, and no two of them close together. A special trip and almost a day's time were required to make a visit to any one of them.

School advantages were exceedingly limited. There were no railroads, telegraph lines, nor telephones; no newspapers and but few books; no bicycles nor even buggies, that we knew anything about, and not many wagons. No pencils; ink was made of soot and pens of goose quills.

A commendably generous spirit prevailed among the people. They were neighborly. The men "swapped work" in clearing, new grounds, rolling logs, thrashing wheat, and shucking corn. They did not know much of the outside world, but they were neighborly and honest.

A shoemaker, Uncle Bill, lived in the neighborhood. In the fall of the year he would take a big roll of leather on his back, his awl, hammer, pegs and lasts in a bag under his arm, and make a round through the vicinity, stopping at every house, making and mending shoes for the winter. His annual trips were looked for with a great deal of interest by the boys and girls, for his visit meant a pair of new shoes for Christmas.

* * * * *

05 -- THE SINGING

An especially significant feature of the old time religion, was the spirit of singing which it produced. If the people did not sing without ceasing, evidently many of them felt like it.

The women sang while they were cooking, washing, sweeping, making new garments, patching old ones, and spinning. The whir of the wheel, the noise of the loom, the rattle of the dishes, and the sound of the broom on the floor, blended in perfect harmony with the voices of the happy women who were as constantly singing as they were working.

Such music to the modern ear would be perfectly charming. People would stop on the streets of a crowded city to listen to it now.

The singing was not all done by cheerful women -- the men sang as well. They sang while feeding the horses, cows, and hogs; while going to and coming from the fields and while at work.

The children began to sing almost as soon as they learned to talk.

The long winter evenings were spent in a typical manner. There were no lamps, and as but few families had bees-wax and tallow enough to make a sufficient quantity of candles to supply domestic requirements, an arm-full of pine knots were carried and placed in one corner of the house every evening. After supper the family gathered around the big, wide fire-place, the women with their knitting, sewing or spinning, and the men with a pile of corn in the center of the floor to shell from the cob, or a few pounds of cotton to pick from the seeds. The light was kept up by throwing a pine knot into the fire occasionally, which, because of the rosin it contained, burned and blazed sufficiently to light the whole room for half an hour or more.

Each member of the family had a particular place before the fire, the same as at the table. When all were seated about the fire for the evening, each with his work in hand, the whole family joined heartily in singing such songs as,

"A Charge to Keep I Have"
"How Firm a Foundation"
"When I Can Read My Title Clear"
"Am I a Soldier of the Cross"
"How Tedious and Tasteless the Hour"
"Jesus Lover of My Soul."

The sound of the work and the voices of the workers mingled in melodious strains as if all had been tuned together by the Harmonizer of the vast mechanisms of the universe.

When a neighborhood of such families met at the Meeting House, and the preacher lined a familiar hymn and said, "Let all the people sing," peals of music poured forth from the congregation which, for earnestness, were only excelled by the slaves themselves during their revival occasions. It was intense and immense.

The men sang tenor (what they now call soprano) and bass, and the women alto and treble.

The singing was done in the right spirit and with a proper understanding also. The heart was put into it; people who heard it knew that the singers had music in their souls as well as in their voices. Frequently some wept and others shouted during the singing, before and after the sermon.

Singing was regarded as a very important part of public worship. There were no organs, nor other kind of musical instruments in the church. A fiddle would not have been allowed on the ground. There were no duets, but once in a while, especially during revivals, the preacher would sing a solo, something like the following.

"Broad is the road that leads to death,
And thousands walk together there;
While wisdom shows a narrow path,
With here and there a traveler."

The singing was purely congregational, led by two or three of the fathers who occupied seats together close to the preacher's right hand. Children's as well as adult's, voices could be distinguished in the singing.

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06 -- THE PRAYING

But few things remain more indelibly impressed upon the memory than the manner, the spirit, and the places in which people used to pray.

Prayer is talking with God, and reading the Bible is God talking with His people. As it is a delight to converse with loved ones, so the soul revels in the privilege of communion with God, through prayer and the reading of His word. This is why prayer and Bible study go together.

The command, "Pray without ceasing," found its fulfillment in many of the dear old saints whose silvery hairs, shining faces, and happy voices linger in memory still. They are in glory now -- the place they talked so much about -- singing with the angels. While here they prayed at work, in secret, at their family altars, and in public places. Their prayers were not distant, nor formal nor uttered as if talking to some stranger or unknown party, not knowing what the answer would be. They were simple, direct, from the heart; the soul's crushing burdens were poured out to God in expressions of desire, offered as if "seeing Him who is invisible," talking with Him face to face.

Almost every person had a place for SECRET PRAYER.

Some in the barn, some in a fence corner, some under an apple tree, some behind a stump, some in the chimney corner, some over the hill, some in the field, some by a log, and some behind the smokehouse.

These, places of prayer, known only to God and the humble suppliant whose knees never tired, but always found rest and strength in them, were held very sacred. They were regarded as forts, or real supply stations of the Christian life. They were visited daily, and sometimes oftener. Nothing but absence from home, or severe affliction, could interfere with these periodical visits to the place of prayer.

A meal's victuals, or a whole night's sleep could be given up much more easily than the hour of secret prayer.

Going to secret prayer became as much a fixed habit as was going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning.

In these places of secret prayer, the whole heart was poured out to God in thanksgiving and praise for the manifestations of His saving and preserving power, while a continuation of His presence, love and mercy was implored. These were precious seasons of soul communion with God. How sweet! Eyes full of tears of joy! Heart full of God's love!

Prayer was not confined to secret places; the soul was so absorbed in God that prayer -- communion with Him -- was both natural and easy. In such a state of devotion to the Lord, to pray from side to side of the field while at work, was the heart's chief delight.

These field prayers, often heard by all who were associated together in the work, and by the people who passed along the road, were deeply impressive. No doubt that many a sinner whose ears were greeted by the voice of prayer, ascending to God from toilers in the field, was made to realize his lost condition. That such praying frequently led to deep conviction and sound conversion is quite probable.

Prayer interests culminated at the FAMILY ALTAR.

The gathering of the family for prayer, the reading of the old leather-bound Bible, the singing of the hymn, the kneeling down and rising up, form a picture in the mind which swiftly passing years and rapidly increasing cares do not dim, but clarify.

The family altar was a fixture: No matter who came nor who stayed away; no matter how busy, nor how much at leisure, the time and attention given the family altar were just the same.

A whole chapter, frequently more, was read. Comments were made. Practical lessons were drawn from the Scriptures.

The prayer, offered by the head of the family, was long, fervent and loud, but no one tired. The spirit of true devotion caught from heart to heart. Some wept; some shouted. The Holy Ghost was present, and the angels hovered around. Heaven was near. Amen! Hallelujah! It was but a step to glory from the family altar.

Other heaven-reaching and soul-stirring prayers were the ones offered at church, sometimes by the preacher and sometimes by others; no matter by whom, they all sounded the same.

No one could hear these prayers without being convinced of the fact that the petitioners had personal acquaintance with God. They forgot, as it were, the surroundings, closed their eyes to the world and opened them to the Lord.

Fervency, faith and power were combined in the prayers. Heaven came down. The congregation was lifted up. "Amen" arose in volumes; many devout souls caught glimpses of the New Jerusalem; and sinners quaked and sometimes fell under conviction.

That was praying. It was not having "a word of prayer," nor "saying prayers," but praying. It was not praying at, but for the people, and, too, with the earnestness that a mother would plead for the life of her child.

The very memory of the old time prayers is inspiring and spiritually elevating.

"Prayer is the breath of God in man,
Returning whence it came;
Love is the sacred fire within,
And prayer the rising flame.

"It gives the burdened spirit ease,
And soothes the troubled breast;
Yields comfort to the mourners here,
And to the weary rest.

"When God inclines the heart to pray

He hath an ear to hear;
To Him there's music in a groan,
And beauty in a tear.

"The humble suppliant cannot fail
To have his wants supplied,
Since He for sinners intercedes,
Who once for sinners died."

* * * * *

07 -- THE TESTIMONIES

Testimony meetings, or telling experiences, is not an invention of modern times, originating in and belonging to camp-meetings exclusively. Such was the custom of the fathers and mothers long, long ago.

The manner in which they told their experiences was deeply affecting. They stood erect, with eyes turned upward, waving, wringing or clapping their hands for joy, with streams of heavenly light glowing in their faces, and tears of gratitude dripping rapidly from their cheeks.

They told in simple language how gloriously God had converted their souls, how graciously He had kept them by His power, and how sweetly He was preserving them in His grace at the present time. All the, praise was given to God who, through his Son, Jesus Christ, had manifested Himself so gloriously in saving and keeping grace.

These testimonies had the ring of victory in them. They came from the depths of the soul, and were laden with that power, which, under grace, reaches and melts hearts. Everything was natural and easy. There was no "put on." The Spirit led, Jesus was lifted up, and He drew the hearts of the people to Himself through the testimonies of His people.

Many of the scenes in Experience Meetings, which occurred long ago, can never be forgotten. As the veterans of the cross arose to speak, their eyes would snap and sparkle with love and light, and sometimes their whole bodies would quiver gracefully, as if shaken by the breezes on Canaan's happy shore. An occasional wave of the hand moved the people like heavy peals of thunder.

Who can forget the scenes, the manifestations of God's presence and power, and the testimonies given, in the old log meeting house on the hill long ago?

There were other methods of giving testimony for the Lord besides the one usually employed in meeting: The consistent lives which the saints lived; the patience they exhibited under all circumstances; the love they had for one another; the interest they manifested for the salvation of the lost; the manner and spirit in which they faced and overcame the tempter; the devotion which they had for God and His cause, were living, convincing testimonies of God's willingness and ability to save to the uttermost all who meet His requirements for full salvation.

These were silent, but burning testimonies. They were not formulated in words, but were on exhibition in actions all the day long.

These silent testimonies could be found in all legitimate avocations -- on the farm, in the store, in the mill, in the shop, and other places -- where, whatsoever was done, was done "heartily as unto the Lord and not unto man."

That was living out of and above self, for a high and holy purpose, for and with God.

Another noticeable feature of the old time testimonies was the apparent ease with which they were given, whether in or out of the church. There was no straining, no forcing, no attempts at the unnatural. Everything was perfectly easy.

The glorious Sun of Righteousness, having arisen with healing in his wings, shed forth his rays of warmth in the heart, of peace in the soul and of light in the face, and possessed the whole being, affecting every thought and every word and every action.

Under such circumstances it was one of the easiest and most natural things in the world to constantly witness, in some way, often unconsciously, to the presence and preserving power of the Holy Ghost.

"I love to tell the story;
More wonderful it seems
Than all the golden fancies
Of all our golden dreams.

"I love to tell the story,
It did so much for me;
And that is just the reason,
I tell it now to thee.

"I love to tell the story;
For those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting
To hear it like the rest.

"And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story
That I have loved so long, "

* * * * *

Shouting was very common in the early days. At almost every meeting, and sometimes at home, some of the fathers and mothers would shout the praises of God.

They did not believe in quenching the Spirit, and when God opened heaven, and poured some of the joys of the glory land into their souls, no matter who was praying, preaching, or exhorting, their cups ran over, and they gave expression to their feelings in glad hallelujahs.

They did not shout for the purpose of being seen of man. Shouting is one thing that cannot be successfully counterfeited. It must be in and come from the heart, or else it cannot be distinguished from the noise of a political hurrah. The saints of old shouted because they were spirit filled and spirit thrilled to an uncontainable degree. The joy of the Lord overflowed in their hearts, and could be seen in their faces, heard in their words, and felt in their presence.

But few hearts were so hard as to be untouched and unmoved by the Holy Spirit during the shouting of the children of God. Marvelous displays of divine power were frequently manifested through this medium of shouting. Whole congregations were moved, swayed, and held spellbound, as the trees in the yard during the storm. Many Christians burst into tears and expressions of joy, fulfilling without effort the command, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice," and sinners became greatly alarmed over their condition.

No one attempted an explanation of the phenomenon of the effects of Holy Ghost shouting upon the people, good and bad, which were plainly observable by all, but the moment a white-haired saint arose, ripe and ready, robed and waiting for transportation to the New Jerusalem, and began in thrilling tones, "Glory!" "Glory " "Glory!" "Hallelujah!" "Hallelujah!" "Hallelujah!" a wave of power swept over the whole congregation -- God was in it.

While shouting, there was a glow on the faces of Christians, which was not of the earth, earthy, but of the Lord from heaven, which showed that their abiding place was "in the secret place of the Most High," covered with the shadow of the Almighty.

Such scenes were frequent -- they were expected. Many thought that meetings without them were failures. It didn't take a week's preaching and exhorting to get the people "worked up" before they could shout. They were warm when, and even before, the preacher began; they kept warm and on shouting grounds.

The following incident occurred in a Texas Holiness Camp-meeting in July, 1900:

A woman began to shout. A stranger stepped up on the altar quickly, where he could be seen by the whole congregation easily, and asked, his voice being loud and shrill enough for all present to hear him distinctly, "How does she live at home?"

"She lives at home like she shouts at church, was the simultaneous answer from a number of her neighbors.

"Then, Sister," said the stranger to the woman who was shouting, "Go on; you have a perfect right to shout."

So it was in the olden time. The people who shouted had a right to shout, because they lived right at home.

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09 -- THE CONVICTION

One of the most remarkable features of the old. time religion was, the awful conviction which came to the hearts of the unsaved during revivals.

When the Holy Spirit took hold of sinners in convicting power, opened the eyes of their consciousness, and awakened them to a vivid realization of their true condition as it was before God -- a yawning hell just beneath their feet, moving to meet them at their coming, and their sins, like mountains, crushing them into the maddened fury of its tormenting flames -- many of them fell down suddenly, and became utterly helpless. Others seemed to be convicted by degrees, but as a rule, no less powerfully.

In whatever manner conviction came upon sinners, the effects were similar: the appetite was lost, sleep departed from the eyes, ability and disposition to work ceased, all manner of sin was hated, and worldly associations were voluntarily discarded; the soul had but one desire, and that was intensified beyond description in words; the whole being was absorbed in longings to get right with God.

A theologian to explain that a literal hell existed, into which all the wicked should be turned, was unnecessary for convicted sinners; they knew that as well as they knew that they were living, and they knew, also, that they were almost in that awful place of never ending, but always increasing, despair.

No matter what kind of rambling, unsettled theories may have crept into the mind, and even been argued, concerning the future state of the wicked, a genuine case of conviction was all that was necessary to establish, without question or explanation, the orthodoxy of the New Testament fire and brimstone hell.

The same is true yet. Times may have changed, but God's dealings with the people, like Himself, are changeless.

No wonder, then, that convicted sinners lose their appetite and desire for sleep. Who, in such a condition, would not? The one supreme and all important thing necessary is, as seen and felt by all who are under conviction, to obtain from God, through Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of all sin, and the witness of the Holy Spirit, giving the unmistakable assurance that the work is done.

A soul cannot be converted until it makes a full, complete, and an unconditional surrender to the Lord, but God can, and often does, convict people who have no desire or inclination to be saved.

In answer to the prayer of parents for their ungodly children, the Holy Spirit has gone, times without number, into stores, fields, offices, in other places, and in other states, where they were at work, and there, against their wills and over their stout protests, "sent an arrow of conviction" into their hearts, which produced all the effects mentioned above.

God can reach people anywhere, even those who have fallen to the very uttermost depth of sin and shame, and can lift them to the highest plane of Christian experience and enjoyment. "With God nothing shall be impossible," and "all things are possible to him that believeth."

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10 -- THE MOURNER'S BENCH

Not at a penitent's farm, nor at an altar, but at a plain Mourner's Bench is where most of people used to get religion.

It was then thought unnecessary to sugar-coat, or nickname, a place in order to entice a convicted sinner to go to it to seek the salvation of his soul. No attempts were made, either, to catch the unsaved, by mysterious propositions, unawares. The plain powerful Word was preached. Things were called by their Scriptural names. The wicked were told of the awful doom which awaited them, and entreaties, in tears and in travail of soul, often in fasting, were made for their salvation.

The sinner, convicted of his sins, was glad to go to the Mourner's Bench, or anywhere else, for the prayers of the people. Salvation is what was wanted.

Some seekers would get converted the first time they went to the Mourner's Bench, while others went often; and while there they prayed, and wept, and agonized, sometimes loud enough to be heard half a mile away. They were in earnest.

The bowing on one knee, the chewing of gum, the looking around and tittering, the flirting about of costly fans and the like, now common things, were not known in the good old days when the Mourner's Bench was the most prominent place in the meeting house.

The conversions, or "coming through " as it was then called, were very bright, as a rule. Loud shouts followed. Nearly all the Christians present joined in the shouts of praise to God.

The mourners were not urged by zealous, but knowledgeless altar workers to "believe," "believe," "believe" before they had reached believing grounds. They were told to sink lower, to pray more and to die completely to all sin. They were assured that when they met God's conditions for that religion which saved from a burning hell, the Lord would give it to them and they would know it.

The people believed then, that if mourners were let alone at the Mourner's Bench until God lifted them up, there was not much danger of them falling away.

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THE END