



George Clarence Clark
Pioneer of the Faith



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The Book of Job begins with the phrase, “There was a man. . . .” This phrase would lead the reader to think that the Book of Job is a book about Job, but it is not; it is a book about God. Likewise, the title of this book might lead the reader to think that this book is about my father, George Clarence Clark, Sr., but it is not. It, too, is a book about God and His glorious, terrible work upon and through a man.

It is the story of great mercy shown to a confused, self-willed sinner who had ruined his own life and damaged others. It is the story of how God washed sin from that sinner’s heart and anointed him with power to preach the gospel, to work incredible miracles, to heal the sick, and to teach the truth of Christ. It is the story of how that redeemed man fell from godliness into bitterness and sin and how God rescued and restored purity and righteousness to His fallen servant.

In every story, let me encourage the reader to see through the veil of human words and deeds to behold our mysterious God silently guiding the hearts of men to fulfill His mysterious purposes. My hope is that the Lord will receive this work of my hands, as by it I do earnestly seek to bring Him honor for His work among us.

jdc
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Introduction

Ever since Onie had been four years old, she had suffered epileptic seizures. When her brother, Clarence, came for a visit, Onie, now twenty-four years old, happily bounced out on the porch to greet him. Although she agreed with the rest of the family that her brother had gotten himself into a strange religion, she still loved him dearly and was glad to see him coming. As he approached, Onie suddenly swooned and then collapsed onto the porch floor, seized again by the demon of epilepsy. The faith of Christ immediately rose up in Clarence. He laid hands on his sweet younger sister, and, in the name of Jesus, rebuked the demon that tormented her.

In those days, there was almost no such thing as an air conditioned home, and a lot of houses did not even have screened doors. So, in hot weather, the front and back doors of many houses were left open to allow cooling breezes to blow through. That is how it was that day at the home of his mother, Cora Lee. One could see all the way through the long hallway to the back of the house and through the open back door, and when Clarence laid his hands on Onie, he saw a demon in the shape of a frog come out of her mouth and fly through his mother's open front door, down the long hallway, and out the back door and up, out of sight into the summer sky. Meanwhile, Cora Lee had heard Onie fall onto the wooden porch and had come running. Seeing her fallen daughter lying unconscious on the front porch, she screamed, "Oh, my God, she's dead!"

But Clarence comforted her. "Ma, you don't have to worry. She'll never have another seizure."

They worked with Onie and brought her to herself as she lay on the porch. When she finally opened her eyes and saw her mother holding her, the first thing Onie said was, "Ma, I'll never have another one of these seizures again!" Though she had been unconscious, she knew in herself that something had happened and that she was forever free. She lived into her nineties without another epileptic seizure.

How is a rebellious young man transformed into a minister of Christ anointed with power from God, except by life-changing grace? This is the story of such a young man, George Clarence Clark, who wrestled with life much as Jacob wrestled with the angel for a blessing from God. Like Jacob, the struggle left him with some scars, but in the end, and again like Jacob, he won the wrestling match and obtained the blessing of the Lord. But to understand fully where he came from and how awesome a work God performed in this man's life, let's step back into the days before his birth and see how God "*worked all things together for [his] good.*"

CHAPTER ONE

Before God

LEAVING SOUTH CAROLINA

“. . . the canonading and sharpshooting is heavy . . .”

In the spring of 1864, General Grant’s Yankee army crossed the Potomac River into Virginia for what would be the decisive campaign of the Civil War. By mid-June, the Yanks were encircling the city of Petersburg, through which four rail lines brought desperately needed supplies to Richmond, the Confederate capital. These rail lines made Petersburg, as Grant said, “the key to taking Richmond.” Grant eventually succeeded, but it would prove to be a costly conquest. His first assault in mid-June, badly bungled by his generals, cost him 10,000 men, but Grant’s resolve was unshaken, and his army continued the offensive. At first, the beleaguered Confederates surrendered some ground, but their resistance stiffened behind a powerful line of defense that stretched over hills south and east of Petersburg. There, the battle stalemated into what would become a dreary, ten-month siege.

In some places, the lines of the opposing armies were so close that the opposing soldiers spoke to each other, sometimes meeting under flags of a truce to trade goods. David Jackson Logan, a popular young Lieutenant in Company F of the famous 17th SC Infantry, wrote home on June 8th that “our yankee friends are all in good speaking distance of us.” Unknown to Lt. Logan, however, some “yankee friends” from Pennsylvania, many of whom had been coal miners before the War, were already tunneling toward his hilltop position at Elliott’s salient in the Confederate line southeast of the city. The ingeniously designed tunnel was begun on a slope where Union and Confederate pickets were less than a hundred yards apart, and the tunnelers’ intention was to detonate four tons of explosives beneath Lt. Logan and his compatriots, thus opening the way for an all-out assault.

Critical to the success of this clandestine operation was that the tunnelers avoid detection, but how could they, with Confederates positioned as close as seventy-five yards away? One effective precaution against detection was the heavy use of sharpshooters to pick off any Confederate who dared to lift his head from the dusty, lice-infested trenches. For their part, the Confederates suspected that a tunnel was being dug toward their line, and since it was impossible to send out scouting parties, they tried to find the Yankee tunnel by exploring the ground with a few tunnels of their own, but to no avail. Consistent with the strange fortunes of war, one counter-tunnel at Elliott’s Salient was abandoned because of a lack of tools. It was later learned that the defenders at that point failed to intersect with the Yankees’ tunnel by only a few feet.



Entrance to the tunnel as it appears today.

Fear of sudden death by sharpshooters was constant, and it was exacerbated greatly in Company F when late in the afternoon of June 18, a bullet from the Yankee line claimed the life of young Lt. Logan, a beloved and respected officer.

Ironically, Logan was shot in the forehead while in the act of cautioning his men not to raise their heads and expose themselves to that danger.

On July 6, 1864, safely hidden for the moment from deadly fire, an exhausted young soldier named Randolph from the 18th SC Infantry took the time to scribble a letter to his Aunt from a position outside Petersburg, toward which the enemy's tunnel was being dug even as he penned his letter. Twenty-four days later, on July 30th, his brother Jasper would die with hundreds of others when the four tons of explosives beneath the sleeping Confederates was ignited. The blast would open a crater in the earth thirty feet deep, one hundred-thirty-five feet long, and ninety-seven feet wide, according to a report by General Bushrod Johnson. The thunderous explosion erupted “like a volcano at the feet of the men,” sending one hundred thousand cubic feet of earth roaring toward the stars, hurling cannons and humans alike into the pre-dawn sky. Enormous chunks of airborne earth then returned to earth again “in heavy masses, wounding, crushing, or burying everything within its reach.”

But that would happen on the 30th. For the time being, there was a lull in the fighting, and young Randolph, unaware of the underground danger that was inching its way toward his position, took time to write his letter:

Dear Ant:

As I have not riten you in sum time I will therefore take the opertunity this afternoon to rite a few lines which will inform you that I am yet on the land of the living and in tolerable good helth. . . . Dear Ant I hardely no what to say to you as I am so dissturbed and fatigt . . . wee have very strong fortifocations we are in tolerable close quarters with the yanks our lines are in seventy five yards of them in sum places wee have not had any generl engagement for severl days the canonading and sharpshooteing is heavey we have suferd severly since wee came to Va. our company and Regt. has redust [reduced] almost one half we have gin a fiting and dying in breastwork and building fortifications until I am compleetely worn out Otherwise mee and brother Jasper has com through and has not bin hurt while othrs have sunk and is now under the clods of the earth and your husband is numbered with them.

Private Randolph was writing during an oppressively hot and dry spell, but at least his regiment had not been engaged in any significant battles for a couple of weeks or more. The armies of generals Grant and Lee were entrenched, dirty, and utterly exhausted. Since Grant's invasion of Virginia that spring, these poor men had fought one incredibly gruesome battle after another – ironically, almost all of them “won” by the South. Citizens in the North complained bitterly of the enormous losses; Grant was called a butcher; he ceased to be cheered by his soldiers; but nothing could make him retreat. He knew that the North had superior numbers, and he was determined to exploit his advantage. Now, after the battles of the spring, and stalemated by the Confederates at Petersburg, Grant's troops were finally

being allowed to rest. Both sides, dirty and weary, sweated in their bone-dry trenches. Sharpshooting became the principal danger.

One of Randolph's comrades from South Carolina whose life was cut short by Yankee sharpshooters at this place in the Confederate lines was another young private named James J. Clark. Private Clark was picked off by some alert Yankee just four days before Randolph penned his sorrowful tidings to his Aunt. James belonged to South Carolina's battle-tested 17th Infantry, Lt. Logan's Company F, and he was among the unfortunate many whose sudden death prompted Randolph's description of Yankee sharpshooting as "heavy". James left his widow, Isabella, to care for their eleven-month-old son, John Thomas.

We don't know many details of James' death. It is enough to know that God directed the Yankee sharpshooter's attention to James' exposed head on July 2nd, 1864, and then God directed the sharpshooter's cruel bullet to its destination. The Almighty had plans for John Thomas that did not include his father James. This is a story about God.

In just seven years, little John Thomas Clark was also orphaned by his mother. At seventeen, he married an older woman and began to pursue a career in medicine. While interning in Charleston, the Great Earthquake of 1888 struck the city. He should have been on duty that night; instead, he was being entertained by a southern belle in her home somewhere near the city. When the quake hit, he knew that he would be needed and missed by his superiors, so he tore himself away from his sweetheart's arms and fled into a pitch black night to return to duty. Running in the deep darkness, the family story goes, he kept crashing into hills of dirt. Recovering from a collision with one mound, he would run again, only to smash into another. "If I live through this," he promised himself, "I'm coming back to find out what these things are that I keep running into." He did survive that disaster, and he returned to the mysterious field that offered him no aid in returning to duty. There he learned that what had impeded his progress that night were potato hills. Farmers often kept their newly-harvested potatoes fresh by piling them high and covering them with dirt.

That's all the information we know about Dr. Clark. We don't know why he sold his inheritance of 250 acres and left his state and his wife behind. A quiet family rumor held that Dr. Clark fled to avoid prosecution for shooting a man over the affections of a woman, perhaps those of his older wife, Mary. Whatever his motivation, it was God's plan, and in the mid-1890's, Dr. Clark settled on North Carolina's swampy, sparsely populated Goose Creek Island. There he met and married Cora Lee Alcock, daughter of the local magistrate. Their first child, a daughter, died in infancy, but three other children would follow. On March 2nd, 1901, George Clarence was born, the second of the three surviving children, and the only son.

THE DEAD FOOL'S SON

By all appearances, Dr. Clark was steadily working toward a financially secure future. He regularly bought property, at least six parcels between 1900 and 1905, purchasing the last eleven acres on the north of Jones Bay just six months before his death. He was increasing the size of his family as well. His third surviving child by Cora Lee, a daughter named Leona, was born in 1905. But he seemed to be a tormented man, and he became an alcoholic. Once, while inebriated, he sat at the kitchen table as Cora Lee patiently waited on him, bringing him any food or drink he asked for. Touched by his wife's faithfulness even in his wretched condition, Dr. Clark began to weep. He asked his loving wife, "Why are you so good to me?" She responded in all sincerity, "I am good to you because I know where you will go when you die. This world is the only place where you will ever know any pleasantness, and I want to be as good to you as I can as long as you are here." She didn't have to wait long.

Growing increasingly frustrated over his inability to control his addiction to alcohol, Dr. Clark declared to his wife that if he ever got drunk again, he would kill himself. Not long after, he surrendered again to the call of the bottle, and it was during that spell of drunkenness that he was found dead in his office. The date was the 6th day of the 6th month, 1906. His office stood next to the family home in the island community of Hobucken. His wife found that the office was locked from within and called some neighborhood men to break down the door. There they discovered his body on the floor, with an empty bottle labeled "poison" lying beside him. Officially, the death was ruled accidental. That made it possible for Cora Lee to receive money from her husband's life insurance policy.

As far as the public knew, Dr. Clark had simply gotten drunk in his office and had accidentally drunk from the wrong bottle. But everyone in the family who knew of his previous threat of suicide entertained strong suspicions that the true story was different from the public one.



Dr. Clark, Cora Lee and their two oldest children, Gertrude and George Clarence. The picture was probably taken in 1903.

In these years immediately after the turn of the century, there were small groups of Spirit-baptized believers who traveled through the towns and villages along the east coast spreading the good news of the Pentecostal experience. Before his death, Dr. Clark had arrogantly sworn that as long as he lived, there would never be any holiness preaching on

Goose Creek Island. But God always has the last laugh on those who puff themselves up against Him. And doesn't it seem ironic that God would first give this man over to death (as Dr. Clark himself said would have to happen before the holiness faith would come to his island) and then raise up the dead fool's son to become one of the greatest preachers of true holiness in the early twentieth century?

This is a story about God, not about men.

FROM GOOSE CREEK TO KINSTON

Dr. Clark left to his widow not only their three small children but also a financial burden. He and Cora Lee still owed a significant amount on land, and he was owed an even more significant amount from his patients in the island community, most of whom never paid their last debt to the doctor. Cora Lee, a very tough-minded young woman, had to work hard to make ends meet, and she did. She suffered through the death of both her mother and her younger brother in 1905, the death of her husband in 1906, and the death of her father in 1907. It was a tragic eighteen-month span for the young mother, now left to fend for herself, but she dealt with life as it was handed to her. Within a few years, she had remarried, and life proceeded for her and her family at a rugged pace. Her new husband, mild-tempered J.W. Leary, was much younger than she and was the second of three husbands that Cora Lee would outlive, all of them named John.

On a cloudy September afternoon in 1913, twelve-year-old “Georgie”, as the family called him, was sitting on the fence in their front yard when an ominous sensation fell over him. He went across the yard into the house and, without making much of it, mentioned to his mother, “Ma, I don’t believe we will ever spend another night in this house.” Cora felt cold chills come over her but said nothing.

That same evening, after all had gone to bed, one of the worst storms in North Carolina history swept in from the ocean and struck the island. The three Clark children were awakened by their distressed mother. “Hurry, children, I don’t think this house will be able to stand this storm.” The family worked its way in the darkness through rising water, furious wind, and crashing thunder to a house on higher ground. When the storm abated and the waters receded in the following days, J.W. and Cora Lee returned to their home site, now devoid of any building. After a brief search, they found half of their house smashed against the trees on the far side of an adjoining field. The other half, they never found at all.

J.W. was able to find a job in Kinston, North Carolina, and the family moved inland from remote Goose Creek Island to the city of Kinston where Clarence, as “Georgie” was known to his city-bred classmates, was completely out of place. He stuttered very badly, and it was only by the extraordinary efforts of a compassionate teacher that he ever learned to communicate well. He was twelve years old and, I assume because the Goose Creek Island teacher was unable to teach such a difficult pupil, was still on the first grade level. But through the efforts of that one exceptional teacher, Clarence was soon completing more than one year’s school work each year.

In these early teen years, my father developed a strong dislike for being laughed at that he carried with him the rest of his life, and as a new kid from the country, he strove to avoid the insults that children typically hurl at other children who are not as sophisticated as they. Clarence was bright, though, and he caught on to city ways quickly; but in the effort to fit in, he made the error of trying too hard, and he became an unruly and mischievous teenager.

THE WAY GOD WORKS

In one brawl, Clarence was scarred for life by a blow to the back of his head with the butt of a pistol. He never forgot the squishing sound that accompanied his every step home, as the blood from his wound ran down his back and filled his shoes. At one point, by court order, he was put under a 9:00 p.m. curfew and was forbidden to carry any weapon, not so much as a pocket knife. He got around that restriction by carrying only half of a pistol, while his cousin and comrade in mischief, Ernest Emory, carried the other half. But although my father was a mischievous teenager and found himself occasionally in trouble with the law, he possessed a sincere respect for anything that had to do with Jesus, though he labored to prevent his friends from discovering that inner disposition. There were nights when, after a day of mischief and sin, he would go to bed and dampen his pillow with tears of shame and remorse to the extent he would have to turn his pillow over to be able to sleep on it. But he feared to let his friends know that “tough” Clarence Clark hated the sins that he was committing.

Nevertheless, when God wants a person, there is no hiding place from His convicting love. For His wandering children, God will lay obstacles along the way to prevent them from going too far down a wrong road, and will guide the wanderers home, although they may still be in the clutches of sin and rebellion. Here are two examples of how God worked this mercy in my father’s life:

One day in about 1917, Clarence decided that he’d had enough of school. The next morning, bright and early, he arose and ventured out into the world a free man. How robust he felt as he strolled along Queen Street, Kinston’s main thoroughfare, which, busy as it was, would remain unpaved until seventeen years later. As he walked down the street, he passed a lowly street cleaner in dirty clothes, laboring to shovel up yesterday’s manure before that day’s wagon traffic grew heavy.

The street cleaner stopped when he saw the youth stroll by and hailed young Clarence. “Hey boy, why aren’t you in school?”

With a smirk, Clarence boasted, “I quit!”

The street cleaner’s response was filled with disgust. “What’s wrong with you, boy? You want my job?”

The street cleaner’s question, inspired by God for Clarence, struck his heart and altogether took the excitement and joy out of his new-found liberty. He shivered at the thought of being in that poor man’s situation, and he was back at school the next day. He never forgot that man’s sobering question and was always thankful that God used that lowly street cleaner to turn him from the foolhardy path he had just taken.

Another instance of God’s saving mercy occurred when Clarence was playing a football game with his high school team. There was a very good player on the opposing team that he and his teammates wanted to knock out of the game. So, he and several of the other players waited for the right moment and ganged up on him, hitting him very hard from several directions at once. But Jesus caused the crashing bodies on that play to fall in a specially pre-

ordained way. For, as it turned out, Clarence lay at the bottom of the pile of bodies, nose-to-nose in the dirt with the young man he and his teammates had so unfairly attacked, neither able to move for a few moments because of the weight of bodies stacked upon them. Clarence knew that he had done wrong to this hard-playing opponent, but when he looked into his opponent's eyes, they looked back at him without malice.

With a slight but sincere smile, the battered young man said with quiet friendliness, "This is a rough game, isn't it?"

That simple comment was a flaming arrow, piercing Clarence's guilty heart and burning his conscience with shame, and it accomplished what God intended that it should accomplish. Clarence made up his mind from that day forward that if he could not beat an opponent fair and square, he just would take the loss and admit that the better man had won. Clarence still knew nothing about God, but God knew him and was shaping the young sinner's frame of mind, years before he repented of his sins.

This is the way God works all things for the good of His children, even while they are still in darkness, before they discover who He is and before they come to Him for forgiveness. If you belong to Jesus, you have experienced similar things from His hand. He has also directed events and circumstances of your life to prevent you from going too far into sin because He loves you and wants you to have a happy life. It is a part of His great love for us to save us from self-destruction before we come to Him for mercy.



1919 Kinston High School Football team.

Standing Center: High School Principal, Dr. E. C. Carroll.

Students Standing L to R (Backfield): Charles B. McNairy, Ellis Simon,
Gene "Rip" Sumrell, Herbert Spear.

Middle Row (Linesmen and Ends): Geo. Nensmask, Richard Tyndall, Guy Gooding,
Roland Blow, **CLARENCE CLARK**, David Pearson, Randolph Spear.

Bottom Row (Substitutes): Thomas Mewborn, E. R. "Buck" Wooten, Mike Lee.

RESCUED AGAIN

I met my father's cousin Ernest Emory only once, in the late 1970s. He was on his way from Florida to New England with his new bride and decided to stop for a visit with his cousin Clarence. I happened to be at my father's apartment when Ernest dropped in. He was a robust man, though like my father, almost an octogenarian. Ernest and my father reminisced a while about their various adventures, such as the time they each carried half a pistol.

The elderly new bride's eyes widened as she listened, and she exclaimed to Ernest, "I'm learning some things about you!"

"Yes," he replied with a grin. "I guess you are."

Ernest roared with laughter as he described to us how he and Clarence, still in their teens, ran a skiff aground. "It was blowin' a gale!" he declared with obvious joy at the remembrance of sailing at breakneck speed over high breakers onto the shore, both the cousins tumbling headlong into the surf when their craft stuck fast in the sand.

In the early twentieth century, Ernest's father was captain of a merchant vessel that ran the east coast as far north as New York. In his summers as a teenager, Clarence worked aboard ship with his cousin to toughen himself for high school football in the coming fall, he said. But there was probably more to it than that. As a high-spirited youth, he must have wanted to spread his wings a little. The high seas and high adventures he and Ernest enjoyed in New York and other places provided the opportunity to do it. Only by the mercy of God, however, did Clarence survive the complete liberty his uncle extended to both him and Ernest while anchored in harbor.

One day in New York City, the gang of toughs that Clarence led agreed to meet a rival gang after dark in a lumber yard for battle. Clarence arrived a little early at the chosen site and sat down behind a stack of lumber to wait. Just then, the other group arrived and gathered on the opposite side of that same lumber pile to prepare for the fight. Clarence, undiscovered, sat still and listened to their conversation. They were receiving orders from their leader. Clarence overheard his instructions and trembled. The other leader gave strict orders to every member of his gang to attack no one but Clarence! They wanted him dead, even if they lost the overall fight. Clarence decided it might be a good time to drift away toward the safety of his uncle's ship. Forthwith, he weighed anchor and quietly shoved off from the lumber yard to the sea, never to return as leader of the gang.

It was only in later years that he realized that, because God loved him, God had put it into his heart to arrive early at the scene and to select the spot he had selected to wait for his fellow gang members, and that it was also God who had sent the other gang to the other side of the lumber pile to receive directions from their leader for the coming battle. Who knows? There may also have been a wandering sheep among the other gang whom God loved and was rescuing from becoming a killer. This is all about God.



The startling, wretched sights and sounds that the young sailor saw in the parks and dives of New York repulsed Clarence. Though he coveted a tough-guy reputation, at heart he was not tough at all. He reveled in the knowledge that he was becoming more worldly wise than his small-town friends back in Kinston, but he did not enjoy the harsh reality of it. When his uncle weighed anchor to depart from the harbor at New York, Clarence saw the dead body of an infant hooked to the anchor as it rose from the water. Clarence's uncle seemed to think no more of it than if he had hung an old tire. He gave the huge anchor a quick jerk, casting off the dead baby, and the infant splashed into the water and sank. The sight was permanently etched into Clarence's mind.

As part of the tough-guy image he pursued, he received the two large tattoos which he bore the rest of his life, but not in obvious places on his body. They were on the *inside* of his forearms. One tattoo was of a many-masted sailing vessel riding the waves in the light of a brilliant setting sun. The other was that of a sailor boy. The location of these tattoos was an indication of his ambivalent character. He was bad enough to get tattoos in an era when respectable men never did. But he was good enough to chose a discreet place on his body to put them. The tattoos were there, in case he needed to show them off, but they were inconspicuous if he held his arms straight down or if he wore a long-sleeved shirt. He was playing both sides of the line. He wanted to be able to navigate among both good and evil people, but such a life is hard to live. A vacillating spirit can never know peace.

Through all Clarence's misadventures, God was watching over him, as He watches over all His children before they come home. Through the darkness and the confusion, Jesus was with him. When Clarence and the ship's cook developed a poisonous hatred for each other, Jesus was there, preventing Clarence from either being killed or killing. Once, the cook managed to creep up on his unsuspecting adversary and attacked. He was swinging down a long metal pipe with full force toward Clarence's head, when just before it would have struck Clarence, the angel of the Lord caused the tip of the pipe to smash with a loud clang on the edge of the ship's metal steps leading to the upper deck. Clarence escaped alive.

On another day while at sea, these two antagonists found themselves alone on deck and became engaged in a brutal fistfight, during which Clarence caught the cook with a blow to the face that sent him reeling backwards and overboard. The victorious teenager glanced around quickly to make sure no one had seen the man go over the rail. He hated the man so deeply that he might not have chosen to sound the alarm, but just to leave him in the sea as food for the sharks. Seeing no one around, Clarence glanced back at the place where the man went over and was stunned to see that the cook's heels had caught the railing of the ship as he fell overboard and that he was pulling himself up. This was not just a lucky break for the cook. The angel of the Lord caused the cook's heels to catch on the rail of the ship, and the angel of the Lord helped the beaten man pull himself back on board.

It was God's decision to spare Clarence both from being murdered and from murdering. The shameful remembrance of murder would have been too much for Clarence's tender conscience to bear after Jesus turned his heart toward home.

This is all a story about God.

AFTER THE CYCLONE

In 1919, as Clarence reached his eighteenth birthday, a traveling tent preacher (and former gambler) nicknamed “Cyclone Mack” set up his tent in Kinston and preached “fire and brimstone” for about a month, sometimes holding three services in a day. His sermons and his antics from the pulpit were front page news every day in the *Kinston Daily Free Press*, which lent the colorful evangelist its full, printed support. He was the darling of Kinston society and officials, even accompanying police on the raid of a local still, no doubt preaching to the moonshiners on their way to jail. The flamboyant, unorthodox evangelist impressed many people of the city, including young Clarence, of their need for Jesus. He attended several of Cyclone Mack’s tent services and even raised his hand once (when the guys with him were not looking) to signify that he now believed in Jesus; but for Clarence, the conviction did not last long after Cyclone Mack’s tent was taken down. He always considered the six or seven years after he drifted away from this early conviction as the darkest period of his life. They would have grown darker still except for the merciful intervention of the One from whom Clarence had turned after Cyclone Mack left town.



Left: Cyclone Mack, from a Front Page article in the Kinston Daily Free Press, Sept. 20, 1919.

“I KNEWED THAT!”

Following the great outpouring of the holy Ghost in the famous Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1905, Pentecostal evangelists, men and women, traveled in every direction across the country, spreading the “full gospel” of Christ. By 1919, at about the time Cyclone Mack was entertaining Kinston and then admonishing the town for its wickedness, such a group was laboring for the Lord in a remote country setting some seventy miles west of Kinston, near the crossroads community of Middlesex, NC. Opposition to these holy Ghost-filled evangelists was fierce. Their tent was burned to the ground by some especially angry locals, but not before these servants of Christ had sown the seed of what would be a great harvest. One heart into which their seed had been sown was a dirt-poor farmer’s wife named Edna Strickland Murray.

Many miles from city lights, this young mother, after long days of labor on the farm, would make the great effort of driving a wagon several miles along narrow, rocky roads to attend holiness prayer meetings. She was reared a Baptist but had heard from that traveling group of Pentecostals about the baptism of the holy Ghost. She had seen the power, and she was very hungry for the truth.

Her husband angrily threatened her, “If you get into that holiness mess, I’m leaving you!”

She responded with as much determination as he, “If it’s of God, I’m gonna have it!”

She continued, with three small children on board, to make the several miles’ journey down lonely, narrow country roads to the closest holiness meeting available. She paid a price in persecution from her husband and neighbors, and she paid a price in physical effort to get to a meeting after working all day on the farm. But God was calling her, and she could not refuse His invitation.

In quiet rural areas such as the one where Edna Murray’s life was spent, sound travels much farther than it does in bustling urban areas. A farmer in those days could stand on his front porch early in the morning and give a loud holler to say hello to a neighbor whose farm was completely out of sight, half a mile away or more. The fields and forests in such places seem to act as magnifiers rather than hindrances to sound. Late on one very dark evening, when Edna and her children were traveling home from a prayer meeting on a lonely stretch of road, she heard the rare sound rumble of an automobile. Her heart began to beat a little more quickly. She hoped it was not coming her way, and if it was, she hoped it would stop at one of the farmhouses it would pass before reaching her. She didn’t know how her mule would respond to the roar of an engine as it squeezed by them on the narrow road at night. Motor vehicles were still rare in that area.

The noise didn’t stop; instead, it grew louder. At first there was only a faint light



Edna Murray and husband

behind her, but soon it burst forth at full strength as it passed around the edge of some woods at a curve. As Edna feared, and despite her best efforts to calm the jittery animal, her mule was “spooked” by the vehicle’s approach and jerked the wagon violently forward, dashing away from the frightening rumble coming from the rear. She could not bring the frightened animal under control, and at another curve the wagon turned over. Other than a few bruises and shaken nerves, she and her children were okay, but she had a very difficult time getting home that night. Nevertheless, she remained undeterred in her pursuit of holiness, and she continued to travel to Pentecostal meetings whenever she could.

On yet another very dark night, she made the same lonely journey to a meeting of the saints with her children. After the meeting, she loaded her tired children into the wagon for the long, bumpy ride home. Along the way, the only sound was the grinding of the wagon wheels peacefully crunching their way home. But then, to her great dismay, she realized that another light was approaching from behind her, and she cried out in desperation, “Oh, God, not again!”

The light grew closer, but there was something strange about it. Suddenly, to her great amazement, she realized what that strangeness was: the light was growing brighter, but there was no noise with it! The night was completely silent, except for the grinding of the wagon wheels on the dirt road. This was almost as frightening as before. What was this? Where was the automobile?

The light grew closer to Edna and her children, ever closer and brighter, until it engulfed and surrounded the wagon. She was astonished at what was happening, but, thankfully, the mule seemed unaffected by it. Her oldest child, Thurman, was the only sibling old enough to remember the event in years to come, and he said that “the light was so bright that you could have seen a pin lying in the road.” What God did that night made an impression on that small child’s mind that never faded away, even into his old age.

Way out there in the dark Nash County countryside, before electric lights were anywhere near, there was light. Quiet, comforting light. And that light surrounded Edna’s wagon until she arrived at the farm. When she drove into the yard, the guiding light from God ascended into the top of one of the huge oak trees that stood before the log cabin that she and her husband called home. It stayed there and illuminated the whole farmyard until she had put up the mule and wagon and gathered the children into the house. Soon after this, Edna received the baptism of the holy Ghost.

Edna’s friends at the Middlesex Baptist Church begged her not to follow the path of Pentecost. She loved her old friends, and they loved her, but God had won her heart. I heard “Sister Edna”, as she was called, reminisce as an old saint about an occasion when her Christian friends, along with her former Baptist pastor, came to rescue her from “the sanctified way”. They meant well, but they were ignorant of what she had received from God. She held her ground as the minister explained to her that being sanctified just meant being set apart for God. “I knowed that,” I heard her testify in old age. “I was a-trying to get to it.” And “get to it” she did.

She and others in that area who dared to pursue God’s righteousness suffered for their faith. One night, when she arrived at a meeting and was leading her children from the wagon into the house, some cowardly neighbors threw rocks at them from the sheltering darkness of night, striking her little boy, Joseph Hilliard, on his heel, which drew quite a bit of blood from the weeping child. Afterward, Hilliard would wonder why a person would be hated for no other reason than having a mother who had gotten into holiness! “You didn’t have to have the holy Ghost yourself to be hated,” he testified in later years. “If you were just kin to somebody who did, they would hate you!”

The words of an old Pentecostal revival hymn that Sister Edna used to sing sum up the way she felt and what she had found in Jesus so wonderful that she was willing to suffer the reproaches of her husband and the ridicule of her neighbors:

*Someone told me that the Glory Land was far beyond the sky,
And I could never hope to enter ‘til my time would come to
die.*

*But since my Savior found me, and he took my sins away,
I am finding glory all along the strait and narrow way.*

Chorus

*I am finding glory all along the way.
I am finding glory all along the way.
Ever since my Savior came,
O Glory to his name!
I am finding glory all along the way.*



Sister Edna as a young woman

As an aged grandmother, in one of her last testimonies, Sister Edna told the saints, “When God calls you, He’ll lead you out and leave no hatred behind.” Obeying the call of Jesus left no hatred in her heart toward those who did not understand and who opposed her calling from God. She was too happy to be angry with anyone.

Sister Edna eventually gave birth to eleven children, and in 1932, when Clarence Clark first traveled as a Church of God minister into the Middlesex, North Carolina, community, one of the little children who sat on his knee was five-year-old Martha, one of Sister Edna’s five daughters. When the little girl sat playfully on Preacher Clark’s knee, neither he nor she dreamed that God had already chosen her to be used in years to come to provide a bitter and ruined Preacher Clark with a wife that would help mend his heart and his life.

This is a story about God.

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW

Upon graduating from high school, Clarence was persuaded by an Army recruiter, with promises of government aid for a college education, to join that branch of the military. So, in 1920, he found himself at Langley Field, Virginia. His job involved the maintenance and storage of the dirigibles that were in use by the Air Corp in those days. Although the recruiter had promised him that the government would help with his college education if he joined the military, he was ridiculed by an officer at Langley for believing that sales-pitch. The officer told him there was nothing to that promise. Clarence was furious. On his first leave, he angrily sought that recruiter in Kinston, and if he had found him, there is no telling what would have happened to that poor man. Fortunately for everyone, the recruiter had already left town. Clarence, now stuck with his commitment of one year to the Army, made up his mind to do as little as possible and bide his time until discharged.

He tried everything to avoid carrying out any duties. He noticed that some men escaped work by being sick, and so, one morning when the call came, "Sick, lame, and lazy, fall out!", he decided that he was sick. He was taken to the infirmary and examined by the camp doctor. Surprisingly, he was diagnosed with a dread disease, and the doctor grimly informed the young man that he must operate on him at once. Needless to say, Clarence made a remarkable recovery.

He was scheduled once for a flight in a dirigible. A few days before the flight, he decided to take some time off to visit a lady friend in the town near the air base. It was an unauthorized break from duty, but he didn't plan on being caught. The young lady held his attention long



A picture of Clarence in his Air Corp uniform.

enough, however, to make his absence noticeable to his commanding officer. Upon his return, he was sentenced to serve in the kitchen, and he was stricken from the roster of those who would make the flight to which he had been assigned. When news came that the aircraft had crashed and that thirty six of his buddies had been killed, he figured he had gotten lucky. But that wasn't it. When God wants a man, he cannot die until God gets him, and this is a story about God.

Clarence was sympathetic to the suffering of others, and he was deeply touched by the loss of his comrades. It repulsed him to hear certain of his fellow airmen curse and swear because "Bill" or "James" had died before repaying them the money they owed. He liked to be thought of as a tough guy, but he was used to tenderness being shown when tragedy struck. So, although he didn't let anyone know, it disturbed him to see no compassion among his comrades. He flinched inside when an officer walked by one very sick comrade and bellowed aloud, "Aren't you dead yet?" In this cruel place so far from home, he learned not to take for granted the tenderness of his mother and other family members. Everything seemed hard and cold in the military; he didn't like it. All he wanted was to get out.

One day, he was in Richmond trying to find the train terminal, on an official leave this time he happened upon an officer engaged in conversation with a civilian. He needed information quickly, for he was pressed for time to catch the train home. After waiting in vain a good while for the two men to give him opportunity to speak, he politely interrupted them to ask his question. The officer was piqued at his subordinate's intrusion and shouted an order for him to stand at attention. Then, the officer calmly continued to converse with his acquaintance for at least half an hour. There was no way then that the furious young airman could get to the station on time, and he had to spend the night in a hotel. That same night, the city of Richmond suffered an enormous fire. The roar of mighty flames and the shouts of people on the streets woke Clarence during the night, but he was still so angry over the actions of the officer who caused him to miss his train that he cursed at the fire, closed the curtains, turned over, and went back to sleep. God kept the flames from crossing the street, and Clarence woke in the morning, boarded a train, and went home.

Christian tradition holds that Friday the thirteenth is an unlucky day. But it was on a Friday the thirteenth in January, 1921, that Clarence was discharged from the Army (probably to the relief of his officers as well as to himself), and thereafter, he firmly maintained that Friday the thirteenth is one of the luckiest days of the year.

BUSINESS SCHOOL

Free at last of military duties, Clarence turned his whole attention to finding some way to get an education. He had fallen completely in love with a pretty and vivacious neighborhood girl named Maude Hodges, and he wanted to earn a good living for her. She was as playful and energetic as Clarence, full of wit and love. For him, the world was a good and happy place with Maude a part of it, and a future with her held promises of nothing but joy and contentment for him.

He worked hard and saved enough money to pay for one term at King's Business College in Raleigh, North Carolina. Determined to complete the entire curriculum in the time he could afford, he enrolled as a student in February, 1922. And in September, 1922, he graduated. His professors told him that no student at King's had completed their curriculum in such a brief time. They did not know that he had been driven to work at a double-time pace because he could not afford to return for a second term. Rightly or wrongly, Clarence always attributed the onset of his baldness during this time of his life to the intensity of his scholastic efforts at King's.

King's Business College

COURSES: Six thorough courses, including Bookkeeping, Shorthand, Banking and Secretarial work.

FACULTY: Large number of specially trained, well-experienced teachers.

EQUIPMENT: Airy, comfortable rooms; individual students' desks; large number new typewriters, adding machines, etc.

POSITIONS: Two well-organized Employment Bureaus assist all graduates to excellent positions free.

TERMS: Individual instruction; no vacations; new students admitted any time; fall term begins September 2nd.

RATES: Full scholarships sold at reasonable prices; living expenses moderate; board arranged for out-of-town students.
Catalog mailed on request

King's Business College

"An Accredited School!"
E. L. LAYFIELD, President.

Raleigh, N. C. Charlotte, N. C.

After seeing an ad like this one in the Kingston newspaper, Clarence decided to pursue a degree in business.

After seeing an ad like this one in the Kingston newspaper, Clarence decided to pursue a degree in business.

Frequently, he traveled by train to and from the college along tracks that ran east and west through Kinston. Viewing through the train's windows the fashionable houses that characterized Kinston's West End, Clarence must have wondered occasionally what kind of home he and Maude would one day share.



In Raleigh, one experience in particular made a deep impression on Clarence: his encounter with aging Civil War veterans. They regularly gathered in the square near the Capitol to reflect on long-ago battlefields on which their youth was spent and to praise or excoriate the heroes or villains that clashed on them. They were congenial old men, obedient to the expectations of the social graces of the time – obedient, that is, until the painful subject of the War of Northern Aggression, as they often called it, was broached. At the mere mention of such men as Abraham Lincoln or Generals Grant or Sherman, their aged faces could swiftly redden with rage, and vile reproaches would erupt out of bitter hearts toward both their northern adversaries and all Southerners who had supported the tyrannical policies of the Yankee President. Then again, they could as easily speak of Robert E. Lee or Stonewall Jackson with a reverence approaching that which is due only to saints of God.

The hot bitterness and scarcely controlled wrath that stalked the souls of those deeply disappointed men made an indelible mark on Clarence's impressionable heart. Memories of their angry curses and their reddened, wrinkled faces, contrasted by their silver hair, never faded from his mind. He had no way of knowing that in just a few weeks this same kind of consuming bitterness and frustration would seize his own heart and, but for the merciful intervention of Jesus, would have held him the rest of his life in clutches of hopelessness, anger, and regret.

MAUDE

It was while at King's Business College that he suffered the blow to his heart that gave shape to the rest of his life. He and Maude were a perfect match and were truly, deeply in love. But Maude possessed as fiery a disposition as did Clarence, and she was ready to marry. Tired of waiting for the expected proposal, she sent word to Clarence at school through her dearest friend, Clarence's sister Leona ("Onie"), demanding to know of him whether or not he was going to marry her. That she did this ignited his easily sparked temper and provoked him to return a foolish, blistering response. He angrily sent his sister away with this terse, hateful answer to his anxiously waiting darling: "Hell, no!"

Late in July, 1922, Clarence entered his classroom carrying a letter from his mother that had come in the morning's mail. During a lull in the class work, he casually opened it. He could scarcely believe the words. Maude, furious at Clarence's harsh reply to her question, had responded to his coarseness by hastily marrying another man. His hands began to tremble. It felt to him as if someone had dumped a bucket of ice cold water on his head. He almost passed out from the shock. Foolishly, he had assumed that Maude would wait for him forever if she had to; instead, she had vindictively ripped apart both their worlds and ruined all their dreams for the future. Worst of all to Clarence, however, was the certain knowledge that her foolish decisions were in large measure his own fault.

Clarence's grades suffered as his mind could not focus on his studies. He could hardly eat or sleep. He was a lost man. Every night his crushed heart sent tears of grief from his eyes down upon his pillow until he fell into a fitful slumber. In his lonely apartment, he lived in a daze. Only after thoughtlessly eating some too-old leftovers in his apartment and nearly dying of food poisoning did he realize he was incapable for the time being of dealing with the normal processes of life. He moved into the school's dormitory, knowing that having other people close by him would provide some security from his inability to concentrate. Besides that, he told himself, "If I die in the dormitory, at least someone will find me quickly and tell my mother."

As it turned out, Maude recovered from her anger within a few months of her marriage and called Clarence, weeping bitterly and begging him please to come take her away. But in those years of the early twentieth century, divorce was too much of a disgrace, and Clarence had too much pride to consider rescuing his darling from the ditch into which she had jumped, not fallen. He told her that she had made her choice, and she would have to live with it. He went his way, and Maude was forced to go on with hers, neither of them ever to love, like that, again.

That was in 1922. Sixty-six years later, God determined that I should meet Maude. My Aunt Onie had managed somehow to stay in contact with her dear friend Maude over the long years, and she wanted to take my father, a widower of three years, to see Maude. As for Maude, she had been widowed since 1950. The two sweethearts had not seen each other in over sixty years. I drove my father, Aunt Onie and her daughter, and Patsy, a family friend, to Kinston. What I saw that day changed my life and touched my heart as never before.

Unknown to any of us, my father was dying of prostate cancer, even though he was feeling well in spite of his eighty-seven years. Maude, at eighty three, was still a vibrant, spry lady. Only once during my parents' forty years of marriage had I seen my father kiss my mother.

That was when I was about ten. They were a very private couple. When we approached Maude's door that day, however she rushed out of her doorway to greet us, clasped my father's face between her two hands and planted a sincere, welcoming kiss square on his lips! That was my introduction to Maude.

We were invited inside, and as Maude, my father, and Aunt Onie began to reminisce, a transformation of sorts transpired. As the conversation progressed, the closeness they all once knew returned, as if a day had not passed since the days of their youth. Patsy and I were not ignored, but we were not a part of that reunion; we were mere observers.

“. . . and I was a moral girl, wasn't I, Georgie?" Maude pertly asked at one point, using the name no one but family had ever used for my father.

"Yes, you were, Maude."

"And you never even kissed me!"

Maude and Onie, both of them giggling like teenagers, reminisced about nights spent with each other as young girls. "Oh!" exclaimed Maude, "We would lie in the bed and talk until 'no, not one'!"

During a more sober moment, Maude confessed that there were times in those long ago days when she would push her baby carriage along Kinston's sidewalks to the places Clarence preached and stand outside, watching him through the windows. There was no need for her to confess there in her living room what she had felt when as a young mother, she wept outside the church windows, watching him. She was prevented from uttering those words by that sweet modesty characteristic of her generation; still, it was clear that as she stood outside watching "Georgie", she was wishing with all her heart that her babies could have been his.

What a conversation they had that day in her living room, speaking of little events long past, of bicycle wrecks and funny sayings, and of touching memories, unspoken and hidden deep in their hearts, that had refused to die through the long years. At one point, jauntily but sincerely, and without any reproachfulness, a question burst out of Maude's impetuous heart: "Georgie, when my husband died, why didn't you come get me?"

I don't remember that he was able to give her a direct answer. Actually, I don't remember much at all of that lengthy conversation, so mesmerized I was by the whole of what I was seeing. I sat in Maude's living room, an unimportant observer to a story of immense importance to my life. I could scarcely take in what I was seeing that day: two people, my father and Maude, who truly were perfectly fitted to each other. Everything about her personality complimented him, and vice versa.

The three octogenarians chatted as animatedly as if they were still youngsters, as if they still had a lifetime ahead of them, and as if they could still make plans and realize them together. But unbending, cold reality overshadowed every fond remembrance. An unspoken awareness of promises unkept and time forever lost tempered every smile, and it added the bitter spice of regret to every loving glance and gentle thought. Even so, the three aged participants in the drama seemed to have been able to ignore, for a little while, time's unfeeling mockery of their ruined hopes and dreams.

Later that afternoon, my father and Aunt Onie said their last good-byes to Maude. God alone knows what feelings and thoughts must have been tearing at their hearts as they all took their leave of each other.

I'm glad I got to hug Maude once.

"Daddy," I privately asked as we walked across the street to the car, "How in the world did you survive it?"

He shook his head and continued looking down as he walked. "I almost didn't," he quietly replied.

In the car, we drove away in silence.

After my father's death the following April, I wrote to Maude. She was kind enough to return a letter to me. In it, she repeated some of the things she had said to us the day we were with her in her home. She told me that the man she had married had been good to her. He had treated her well and provided well for her and her children. She also repeated that she had been a faithful wife to him all their days together. But after losing her Clarence, she added, "I never loved again." The profound grief over losing him that she had quietly borne her whole life poured through her final words to me, especially when she lamented that now, at his death, she had "lost him twice."



Maude, as she appeared about the time I took my father to see her in 1988.

“I DID IT.”

On our return from Maude’s house in Kinston, the day was quickly drawing to a peaceful close as my father and I reached the outskirts of Henderson, North Carolina, where he lived. About five miles or so from his apartment, the full realization of what I had just witnessed began to dawn upon me, and a giant weight of enormous sorrow began to press upon my spirit. As I drew closer to my father’s lonely apartment, God was taking an increasing measure of my father’s grief, secretly held in his heart for over sixty years, and laying it upon me. My father had finally been given another with whom God would allow him to share the incredible grief that he had borne alone for so long.

My father told someone once that of all the twelve children that were his, I, as a youth, was the most distant toward him. When Jesus took over my life, that was reversed, and of all my father’s children, I became by far the closest to him. After Jesus took me into his kingdom and set me free from my stubborn nature, I revered the anointing that God had given to my father more than any of his children. It seemed to me that my father was above the plane of mortal man, superior to others in judgment and righteousness. But there with Maude in her home, he had seemed completely human, a natural part of this world. With Maude, he seemed to belong here on earth among us ordinary people. With her, he seemed to have none of the perpetual discontent with normal life that one always felt from him. And although that was the first and only time I ever met her, I could tell that she, too, was made a whole person only with him by her side. What a rare and unspeakably touching scene I beheld that day! No writer could possibly do it justice. So perfectly were they matched in mind and in spirit that I felt, as I watched them sitting next to each other conversing, that I was looking at one person instead of two. How could anyone possibly communicate the rare beauty of that scene? And what, I wondered, would a life together have meant for those two people?

Now, with each turn of the car as we neared his apartment, the painful weight of my father’s life-long, secret sorrow pressed upon me with increasing heaviness, a burden that until that day I had been unaware my father even carried, although as I was growing up, he had upon occasion made mention of a lost love named Maude. But what could that have meant to me without knowing what I now knew?

By the time we reached his apartment and went into his small office upstairs, I was almost overwhelmed with a suffocating grief. When I realized what unspeakable sorrow my father had borne his whole life, I regretted with all my heart every ounce of pain, or even the slightest concern, that I had ever caused him. I wished I had been a good student in school for him, that I had made him proud in the days of my foolish youth instead of causing him sorrow and shame. There had been times as I was growing up when I felt that I had hated him. But, dear God, how I wished that night that I had hugged him a thousand times instead of drawing away from him!

How earnestly now I wanted to help him to bear this unspeakable grief! But there was absolutely nothing that I could do, and it was killing me. I learned from Jesus that evening that the pain with which God disciplines His children is enough pain for anyone and that if we live in the love of God toward others, we will add nothing to the heartache that God decrees for

them in this life. This was a powerful lesson for me: What God does to any man is enough. Fear God, and add nothing to it. The short time I spent with Maude helped me to realize how precious each person is, how wonderful is just a simple, kind word, and how very cruel is just a little cruelty. Life itself became more real to me that night than it had ever been.

My father sat quietly at his self-made desk, his head bent down, looking at nothing. It was dark outside now. I stood behind him, tears running down my cheeks, staring silently out of the window overlooking the dimly lit street below. The power of that moment cannot be related.

Finally, I turned to him and asked with broken voice, “Daddy, how in the world did you stand it?”

He didn’t look up. He continued looking down at his desk and said softly, “Lord only knows, John, how many nights I have gone to bed crying.”

I do not know how I got away from him that night. I have no memory of it. I do have a memory of stuttering out a heartfelt apology for any and every thing I had ever done to cause him any degree of pain. Looking back on it, I fervently hope that my memory of that apology is real, not one of those memories the mind conveniently invents to help heal the pain of a golden but missed opportunity. Oh, how I wished at that moment that I had been nothing but a good and loving son to him all my life!

I don’t remember driving the two blocks to an empty rental house I owned, and I don’t remember parking and going in. But I do remember that by the time I reached the living room, the weight of my father’s sorrow had grown unbearable, and I collapsed to my knees on the living room floor, helplessly crying aloud for help from God. What if the neighbors heard me? I didn’t care. I couldn’t care; the pain was too great and too real. I desperately needed God. I felt as if I was literally suffocating in sorrow. I was drowning in an unrelenting grief such as I had never known, a grief that wasn’t even mine! I was only helping another man carry a portion of what he had borne alone his entire adult life!

I learned that night how true are the testimonies of saints in the Bible, as well as of those living now, who told all who would listen that God will take a burden and bear it for those who cry out to Him. “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble,*” God said, “*And I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.*” I know that is true, and I do praise Him for it!

I do not have any memory of going back out to my car to make the two-hour trip home that I had to make that night. The pain still held my spirit in its tight grip. I had not yet received any answer from God. It was raining hard, and the tears that flooded my eyes made driving on the dreary highway doubly difficult, but I had earnestly pleaded with all my heart to God for help, and as I drove down the highway, He mercifully sent His word from His sanctuary to help me.

God spoke very clearly and calmly to me. He said, “I did it.”

Immediately, I felt a measure of relief from the crushing load of relentless grief as “the God of all comfort” went on to say, “If he had gotten her, he would never have wanted Me.”

There, on highway 85 South, late one autumn night in 1988, at the age of 36, and by the word of the Lord that came to me, God introduced me to my mysterious father, and a thousand

unanswered questions were resolved. He also introduced me anew to Himself and to His plan for my life from the beginning.

I finally began to understand the restlessness of my father's earlier years. After that afternoon in Maude's living room, he wasn't a puzzle to me anymore. It finally began to make sense to me why neither his wife nor his children ever seemed to occupy in his heart that special place where a man normally holds his own. I finally understood what incessantly drove him deeper and deeper into God, for I learned from his experience that there is a brokenness of spirit so hopeless, so frightening, and overwhelming, that by God's design, there can be no earthly comfort. Only Jesus can make that kind of pain bearable. Only the hands of Jesus can touch such a bruised reed without breaking it. Only the balm of a very close fellowship with the Lord can prevent such a heart-rending loss from driving a man mad. Being normal after the loss of Maude was impossible for my father because being normal meant to suffer unrelenting pain. He had to be closer to God than a normal man because close to God was the only place he could find relief from the torment.

I saw in a vision my father, after losing Maude, running from pain throughout his adult life, finding relief in nothing on earth. First he turned to heavy drinking, then to a hasty marriage of his own, not only to spite Maude but also in hope that having another woman would ease the pain. (Instead, he once told me, it worsened the pain.) Nothing on earth could help him. After Maude, he was a living dead man, his spirit broken.

And then in the summer of 1925 (the details of which I will relate shortly), Jesus spoke to him and opened the door to comfort and joy. And from the time that the word of the Lord came to him, God became his refuge, for absolutely nothing but God brought any relief. How could titles, positions, money, or any reputation among even good men mean anything to one whose heart was hopelessly broken? And in my vision, I saw Jesus, though always near, purposely step away from my father at times, taking comfort with him, to draw my father onward to an ever closer walk with God. I saw, throughout my father's life, Jesus use relief from the pain as bait to draw the broken man ever deeper into the realm of peace and the knowledge of God, to a life of calm familiarity with the truth and power of the Almighty.

This is a story about God, not a man!

In my letter to Maude after my father had died in 1989, I explained to her as best I could what Jesus had shown me, that God had used the pain of their separation to drive my father close to Him and that many thousands of people had benefitted from my father's broken heart



Maude as a young woman.

because he took his pain to Jesus, who knows and loves us best. She never responded to those comments. Born four years after my father, Maude out-lived him eight years, dying in January, 1997. I hope that my words enabled her, at least to some small extent, to endure her last days with a little more tranquility than she otherwise would have known.

In 1922, after graduating from King's Business College in Raleigh, my father gained employment with Swift Packing Company in Richmond, Virginia, and in an attempt to forget Maude, he married a pretty young woman named Violet in December of that same year.

But back to the story.

My father surprised me one day by offering advice on a subject that I had never contemplated. No doubt his mind was on the tragic events of his early life, about which I knew nothing at the time. He told me, "Don't ever marry in order to get over losing someone else. It only makes it worse." At the time he said this to me, I was a very young man and had no intention of marrying anyone, much less marrying one woman to forget another. So, I just shelved the comment, as I did many of the things he said to me at that time in my life, never considering what personal tragedy might have produced in him that wise counsel. I shelved it, that is, until 1988, when I met Maude.

It was not long after obtaining employment at Swift Packing that Clarence's supervisor provoked his still unbridled temper by reprimanding him for a minor error. His supervisor was within his right to do what he did, but self-willed Clarence stormed angrily off the job and returned to his home in Kinston, where he worked part-time at his stepfather's grocery store. This was during the days of Prohibition, and Clarence was typical of many merchants of his time who regularly received illegal shipments of liquor and sold it on the sly. In his stepfather's store, he sold two kinds of hot dogs, a five-cent hot dog and a ten-cent hot dog, the difference being that the ten-cent hot dog came with a free glass of liquor. Once, right after a new shipment of liquor had been delivered, government agents raided the business. They tore the place apart searching for the liquor they knew had just been delivered, but they could not find it. Exasperated, they finally left, puzzled as to where Clarence had managed so quickly and so well to hide the liquor they knew had just arrived.

Clarence chuckled to himself. The agents had paid no attention to the big box sitting on a table in the middle of the store. He had not even had time to hide the box after its delivery, and there it sat, in plain view, right where the men who delivered it had placed it before they walked out with their money.

This is the way of God. Clarence escaped being caught and arrested not because the government's agents were incompetent. Nor had Clarence escaped because he was clever. The reason, and the only reason, that he had not been caught when he so easily could have been was that serving a prison sentence was not a part of God's plan for him. God had other sorrows for him to endure. This is God's way with you, too, if you are His. There are times in your past when you could have been caught and punished for doing evil, or could have been badly injured or killed while being foolishly risky, but those things were not a part of God's plan for you. Or

perhaps they were, for some of you. The point is that your heavenly Father designs your path as He determines what is best for you. Some He brings “through the fire, some through the flood,” but all are brought with love and purpose, and all are at some point brought “through the blood”. Clarence should have been thankful to God for the narrow escape; instead, he probably cursed the officers and later sneered at what seemed to him to be their stupidity. But Clarence’s attitude merely demonstrates the truth that all men are fools until Jesus makes them wise.

This is a story about God.

THE FIRE MAN

While these events were taking place in the life of Clarence Clark the sinner, God's power and love were continuing to move mightily among the saints in the communities around Middlesex, producing some extraordinary people and events.

One of those extraordinary people was a poor farmer named Abbey Murray who had been anointed with miracle-working power from God. He was one of a number of men and ministers in eastern North Carolina whom God anointed during this time with spiritual gifts. One anointing that God had given Brother Abbey was power over fire. Edna Murray's son, Joseph Hilliard witnessed Brother Abbey's anointing as a small boy at one of the prayer meetings to which his mother carried him. Brother Oliver Hopkins, who for many years was a Church of God minister in Knightdale, NC, and who also grew up near the Middlesex community, was another witness of this man's amazing power. In their old age, both of those men on separate occasions told me of times as young boys when they saw Abbey Murray sit on top of blazing logs in a fireplace and suffer no harm.

Hilliard ("Uncle Joe" as we came to call him) said that one thing which stood out in his memory was Brother Abbey's old, ragged coat. It was so tattered that loose threads hung from the elbow, and he said that as Brother Abbey sat on the flaming logs, even those loose threads were not burned by the flames licking around them. These were the poor of this world who were "rich in faith"; they were the "ignorant and unlearned" whom God had chosen "to confound the wise." They may have known little about the physics of the earth, but they knew the God who created it, and He knew them.

Sometimes, people in the neighborhood couldn't get into the farmhouse where a meeting was being held because there were so many inside. Others were afraid to go inside, so they would crowd around the open, screenless windows with the late-arrived saints and watch the meetings from the outside. Little Oliver Hopkins was among them one night. He came especially to watch Abbey Murray, to see if this would be one of those meetings in which he would sit in the fire. It was. Brother Oliver told me that while the saints were praising God and shouting and having a typical holiness meeting, Abbey Murray remained seated and calm. Oliver watched as Abbey rose up slowly in the middle of the singing and rejoicing and very calmly walked over to the fireplace and sat on top of the burning logs. Brother Abbey even reached underneath the logs, gathered a handful of burning coals, and put them into his mouth, rolling them around with his tongue for a while before taking them out. The next day, Oliver said, people came to Brother Abbey and asked him to let them look in his mouth to see if there were blisters in there, but there were none.

In that same community, a tobacco barn caught on fire one day, and one of Brother Abbey's neighbors was about to lose a portion of his crop. But the barn fire was put out. Someone asked the relieved farmer how it happened, and he said, "Abbey Murray run by here talkin' some kind a strange language, and went inside the barn, and the fire went out!"

To Abbey Murray God also graciously revealed the truth about the New Birth (more on that later). But he fell, as my father would also later fall, into the trap of bitterness at the rejection

of that truth by God's own children. But unlike my father, Brother Abbey never recovered from his fall into bitterness. In time, incredibly, the embittered Abbey Murray himself backslid into common sin. At one point, he sank so low that he was found sitting at a whiskey still, concealed deep in the woods, drinking whiskey with a local moonshiner. The moonshiner told him, "I didn' never think I'd see the day when I'd be drinkin' whiskey with you, Abbey Murray."

Late in life, my father had a conversation with Brother Abbey, who had turned his back so far on God that he had started attending a Baptist Church at that time with family members. Finding himself for a moment alone with his fallen comrade, my father quietly asked him, "How is your soul, Brother Abbey?"

Most folks would have thought Brother Abbey's soul was clean, now that he was attending Christian church services. But Brother Abbey knew better than to think that Christian activities would either impress or deceive a brother who knew God. They both knew too much for that. With deep sadness, the backslidden man of God took a deep breath and said, "Brother Clark, I'm afraid to get alone with God and pray."

Uncle Joe told me that when Brother Abbey died, he was buried at the top of a hill and that after a time of rain, his coffin came up out of the ground, even though it was up on a hill and not in a valley. That story reminded me of the Scripture found in Isaiah 14:19, "*But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit, as a carcase trodden under feet.*"

DRAWING JESUS

In 1925, Clarence was more restless and miserable than ever. Not only was he now married to a woman whom he could never love, a young beauty named Violet from Goose Creek Island, but he could not marry the woman whom he would always love. He was considered by more than a few to be a self-willed failure. Life, once so carefree and full of promise, had become a dark maze of trouble. How could his life ever have become so burdensome and confused? Like Maude with her children, Clarence loved his baby daughter, and another was on the way, but he couldn't rid from his mind the tormenting regret that his children were not Maude's. Alcohol was becoming more than an occasional source of comfort. The oblivion it provided was preferable to the realities of his shipwrecked life. An alcohol-induced haze already clouded his memory of every Christmas holiday since he was seventeen, and his desire for its comfort was growing greater with every passing day. But the Lord was about to intervene for Clarence again.

As God arranged it, there came a day when Clarence was alone in his stepfather's house, which he and Violet shared with his parents. His interest in painting led him to search the house for an appropriate subject, and his attention settled upon a small picture of Jesus on the mantelpiece. Brush in hand, the young man set about reproducing on a larger scale his mother's picture of the Lord, and when he completed the painting, he stepped back to compare his work with to the original. He was well pleased with the result.

"I drew you well!" he exclaimed aloud and proudly.

"I can draw you, too!" returned a solemn Voice from the picture.

The young man was utterly stunned. Filled with terror, his head was suddenly turned and his eyes fell upon a dark stain on the hardwood floor next to where he stood. That dark stain was all that remained of his buddy, Rudolph, who just a few weeks before had been chased and shot by a jealous husband. The bleeding Rudolph managed to flee to his friend Clarence's house, only to collapse on the floor of the parlor and die, leaving an indelible blood stain on the floor – and now on Clarence's soul. Try as she might, his mother had not been able to remove the stain of her son's friend from her floor. She did not know that Jesus had ordained Rudolph to bleed and die there so that he could, on this day, deal with her tormented son.

Clarence stared at the stain, shaken and silent. He turned again to the picture on the mantle. It had not moved, but it had spoken to him! He looked nervously around the house. Could it have been someone playing a prank on him? But no one else was in the house. In a daze, he wandered unsteadily, aimlessly about the house, wondering, fearing. Passing by his mother's sewing table, he caught sight of a notice from nearby Ayden Free Will Baptist Seminary that had recently come in the mail. It read:

"WHY NOT ENTER THE SEMINARY THIS FALL?"

A feeling in his heart told him that this was not a coincidence, that this was ordained by the Voice. And he wanted to go. But how could he do such a thing? Clarence Clark go to the Seminary? What a joke that would be to everyone - to the whole town!

Oh, the tyranny of a reputation! It comes into our life as a visitor, but it can quickly become master of the house, demanding that every action be directed toward its maintenance. Clarence had a reputation as a clever, hard-nosed “wise guy”. Nothing ever touched Clarence’s heart. He never felt anything. . .or did he? He had never let anyone know of the tearful nights of shame and regret for sins committed, but those secret tears were not hidden from “*Him with whom we have to do*” for “*all things are open and naked unto His eyes.*” And the Savior had come now to offer Clarence a choice. He could submit to the tyranny of his tough-guy reputation or he could submit to the love of God. He wanted to follow the Voice, but what would his friends and family say? He decided that when his family returned home that afternoon, he would broach the idea of attending the Seminary with the one person whose love for him he knew was steadfast: his mother.

They arrived, and he waited for an opportunity to be alone with his mother. When she went out the back door, he followed, caught up with her behind the house, and drew her aside. It was difficult, but he managed to push the words out, awkwardly and sheepishly, yet sincerely. “Ma, what would you think if I entered the Seminary this fall?”

To his relief, his mother encouraged him, even though her words reflected both her nonsense character and the deep motherly concern she had for her son. She said, “My God, Georgie, I’m all for anything that will help you change your way of living.”

Clarence didn’t need much encouragement after what he had experienced earlier that day, and those words were enough for him. The decision was made, and news of Clarence Clark’s application to the Seminary spread like dandelion seeds in a high wind. His tough-guy reputation began to suffer for want of nourishment. In a little while, his determination to serve Christ would cause it to die out completely.

TO AYDEN, THEN TO GOD

In the fall of 1925, twenty-three-year-old George Clarence Clark entered the Free Will Baptist Seminary in Ayden, North Carolina. Having only a surface knowledge of religion, he had assumed that the professors of the Bible would agree concerning the Bible’s teachings. He had not been in Ayden Seminary long before he learned that there were deep



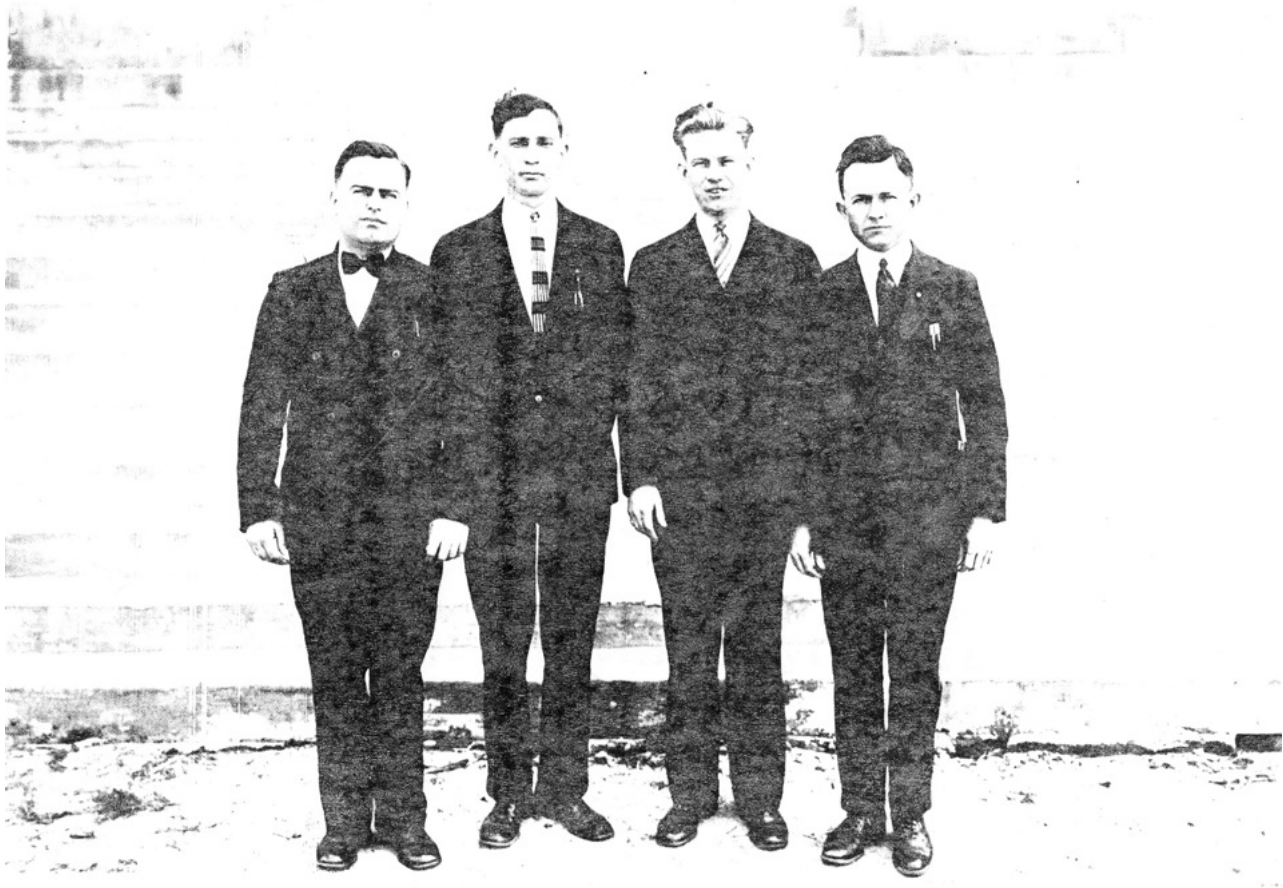
Cora Lee Clark Leary, Clarence’s mother

disagreements among the professors concerning key Biblical doctrines, including the foundational doctrine of salvation. One camp taught that those who believe in Jesus will be saved in the end regardless of their deeds in this life, while another taught that obedience to the will of God is the way to salvation and that without obedience no one will be saved, including born-again people. He was confused. Who was right?

The early twentieth century was a pivotal time in history for the saints in America. The non-Biblical concept, now commonly taught and accepted among believers, of “getting saved” was just beginning to take root. Clarence had grown up as a Free Will Baptist, and he had never heard the phrase, “getting saved”. Among the vast majority of Christians of the time, conversion was called conversion, or “born again”, never “getting saved”. The first time Clarence ever heard of someone “getting saved” was during a lecture at the Seminary by a visiting speaker from California. This speaker was the one who introduced to the Baptist seminarians of Ayden to the phrase, “getting saved”. Clarence turned to his fellow seminarian and good friend, a young man from Florida named I. J. Blackwelder, and asked, “Blackwelder, what’s he talking about when he says that people ‘get saved’?”

Blackwelder replied, “I don’t know, but I think he means ‘converted’.”

Clarence and his friend Blackwelder decided they should do their own study of the Scriptures and see about this new phrase, “getting saved”. They went to the seminary library, did their research, and concluded that the guest speaker was in error. There was no such phrase in the Bible. “Conversion”, they learned, is not a synonym for “salvation”. Conversion is, as they had always heard, an experience to be had now in this life, and salvation is the promised reward to be given to the converted (if they are faithful to Jesus) when the Lord returns for his bride. They shrugged off the lecturer’s strange doctrine of “getting saved” and returned to their seminary studies. Neither of them dreamed at that time that the doctrine which holds that a sinner “gets saved” when he repents would become the incredibly popular idea that it became during their lifetimes. It is very likely that almost none of them knew about “getting saved” at the beginning of the twentieth century; it was a virtually unknown idea. By the end of the twentieth century, “getting saved” had become the very heart of the gospel for millions of evangelical Christians around the world.



*Four Ayden Seminary students: J. R. Davidson, I. J. Blackwelder, Henry Oliver, R. E. Tripp
Clarence's dear friend, I. J. Blackwelder, stands second from the left.*

As with many young men who attend seminaries, both then and now, Clarence did not attend because he knew God but because he wanted to know God. The contradiction of teaching from the professors and the ignorance of prestigious visiting speakers concerning the Scriptures did nothing to satisfy that longing; nor did what he find at the Seminary assuage at all the pain with which Jesus had smitten his heart in order to turn his heart toward righteousness. He didn't know it at the time, but when God calls a man, He calls him to Himself, not to religious traditions, offices, or duties. But God would teach him. And this is a story about God.



Ayden Seminary, with its distinctive conical steeple.

BROTHER PARAMORE

The bustling little town of Ayden was eighteen miles from Clarence's home in Kinston. He took advantage of the rail service that connected the two towns to travel home to his wife and daughters every weekend. It was a pleasant ride. Leaving Ayden, the train chugged its way south through thick woods that could open suddenly into wide, black-sanded fields where farmers and their families worked in the cotton, corn, tobacco, and other crops. Typically, farmhouses along the way were wooden, sometimes unpainted, and solitary. Standing among sheltering groves of spreading oaks, they calmly offered themselves to the traveler's view until again the train plunged into another tunnel of large, sheltering trees along the rails.

On one of these weekend trips, an empty seat invited Clarence to sit beside a rather short man who, on second glance, had a familiar face. It was Mr. Paramore from Kinston, a poor but honest man who often traded at his stepfather's store. Mr. Paramore initiated a conversation with the young man by asking Clarence if he was a student in the Seminary. Upon receiving an affirmative response, Brother Paramore, as Clarence would come to know him, spoke a few words that shook Clarence to his foundation and changed his life forever. He said, "I used to be a Baptist."

Clarence could not take this in. "You *used* to be?" he exclaimed. This was unthinkable. He wondered what had happened to good Mr. Paramore that had made him stop being a Baptist. He knew Mr. Paramore to be a good and honest man. He knew that he had always paid his debts at the store even though he was very poor. And knowing that the ill-educated gentleman was honest made it impossible for Clarence to dismiss his words as the foolishness of the ignorant.

"You *used* to be? Sir, what happened to you?" the stunned young man politely but earnestly asked.

Brother Paramore answered, "God baptized me with the holy Ghost, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues, and added me to the great Church of God."

This response made no sense to Clarence, being completely ignorant of Pentecostal religion, but he was intrigued by what he heard. He asked Mr. Paramore to tell him about it, and along the trip to Kinston that day, he learned that Brother Paramore and some others gathered once a month in a home for prayer meetings. Clarence asked for directions to the house and for the date of the next prayer meeting, and he assured Mr. Paramore that he would attend. In the meantime, he studied the Scriptures to learn about this baptism and speaking in tongues; to find out, first of all, if such a thing was even in the Bible, and, second, if it was the sort of thing that would change a man from being a Baptist to something else. It was all very strange to him, yet it tugged at his heart.

In the days following, he learned that there was in the Bible such an experience as Brother Paramore had described to him. He found out that there was a "baptism of the holy Ghost", with the evidence of speaking in tongues, taught in the Scriptures. His heart began to hunger for something that he did not understand. Without realizing it, what Clarence really desired, and what the Voice from the mantel was calling him to, was not a seminary education, nor even

the religion of Christianity itself; rather, it was to the One whose Voice had spoken to him from his mother's picture. It was a call to God and His love. That was what he wanted, and that is what God had chosen to give him.

When time came for the next home prayer meeting with Brother Paramore, Clarence, true to his word, showed up. He was amazed at what he saw: people praising the Lord *out loud*, all praying at the same time, speaking at times in a language that neither he nor they had ever learned, and rejoicing with a joy he had never seen or felt. He saw, for the first time, genuine spiritual life! The singing that he heard was from the heart; it went deep into the soul, and it was strong. The sermon he heard was simple. It wasn't eloquent like the grand speakers he had heard at the Seminary, but its sincerity and truth carried with it a great weight of conviction. There was something about it all that drew him with cords of love. When he left the meeting that day, he determined in his heart to pursue this, to seek God until God gave him what they had, and what he now very much wanted.

There was power in the honest testimonies of the simple folk in the meeting in that humble old cottage. The scene was so different from the setting where Clarence ministered in the Free Will Baptist Church in Kinston. Earlier in Clarence's life, Darwin's theories of evolution had interested and influenced him, and even now, he had never quite been able to ignore that nagging suspicion that all religion was, in fact, a sham. Even with the experience of the picture from his mother's mantel speaking to him, there remained in his heart a faint suspicion that it was just some unusual psychological event that had taken place. On some Sundays, after delivering his sermon, he would sit in his big chair on the rostrum, gaze at the large stained-glass windows, and feel utter emptiness within. He felt that he would have given the world if he could only know that there really was a God. Now, he had met a group of people who seemed to know God, not just know about Him, a people who claimed to have experienced something real from God. That is what attracted him. Was there a way a man could really *know* that God exists?

“WHAT HAVE I DONE TO THESE PEOPLE?”

On one occasion, the saints who met in that home prayer meeting invited this young Baptist minister to preach for them while Brother Paramore was traveling. Clarence eagerly accepted this invitation, and he brought along with him that day a life-sized picture of Jesus that he had painted. He had painted the picture on a window shade, and at a particular point in his sermon when he was talking about the cruel crucifixion of Jesus, he would pull the string, the window shade would quickly roll down, and the congregation would find itself face-to-face with a life-sized, bloodied and bruised Jesus. Clarence was proud both of his artistic ability and of the fact that he had been complimented by members of his congregation on the effect that his illustration had on them. In this confidence, he attached the window shade to a convenient place on the wall next to where he was preaching that day. Then, he began his sermon.

While he was preaching, Clarence wondered why the folk seated around the room kept whispering. He was used to congregations maintaining a dignified silence while the sermon proceeded. He was to learn, in time, that these poor saints were not being rude; they were praying! They were accustomed to having lively meetings, and this ignorant Baptist preacher, delivering a sermon he had memorized over the days before, had no clue as to how to worship God in spirit and in truth. But they were patient with him. They listened . . . and prayed in whispers. He continued his sermon as best he could until finally the dramatic moment in his sermon came. He pulled the string, and down came the picture of the suffering, bloody Jesus. Oh, how Clarence was shocked by the reaction! The whole room went up in a shout! The saints shouted, called on God, jumped up, fell down, wept, laughed, and “spoke in tongues of men and of angels” for a long while. His surprise painting of their suffering Lord touched them deeply, and their desire to praise God, pent up while this Baptist preacher droned on with his memorized sermon, burst forth like an exploding volcano! They didn’t intend to interrupt the sermon, but they just had to glorify God!

When the window shade rolled down and the saints started shouting, Clarence’s first thought was, “What have I done to these people?” He had never received such a reaction to a sermon from Baptist congregations, even when he used his artistic aid. After a while, the saints recovered themselves, though, and so did he – at least well enough for him to finish his sermon and go home – under more conviction than ever.



Some years later, my father received an invitation to preach in what turned out to be a staid Methodist Church. A holy Ghost-baptized saint, upon hearing that Preacher Clark would speak there that day, decided that she would attend the meeting. When she arrived, she claimed a front row seat. At one point during his sermon that day, she was so filled with glory from God that she stood up, praised God aloud, and danced in the holy Ghost before the amazed and

lifeless congregation, and then returned somewhat surprised at herself, to her seat. After the service, she approached my father with an apology.

“Brother Clark,” she said, “I am so sorry that I interrupted the service. But what you were saying was just so good that I couldn’t help it.”

“Well, Sister, ” answered my father, “If you can’t help it, it’s all right. It’s the Spirit if you can’t help it. But if you *can* help it, don’t do it.”

The saints that day in the little cottage prayer meeting couldn’t help it.

A FIERCE DEBATE

As the weeks dragged on, Clarence took advantage of every available moment with Brother Paramore when the old preacher was in town. He asked questions and read the Bible with him. These were happy hours, and he never tired of them. He was now hungering and thirsting for God's righteousness. His seminary training began to be less and less meaningful to his hungering soul. The speakers, the books, the theories, the theological debates, the lectures, all began to seem dry and burdensome. He still respected his professors; he appreciated their learning and was thankful for their efforts, but they could not help him now. An irresistible thirst to be filled with the spirit of God possessed him, and what his professors offered him was useless to quench it.

At last, in the middle of one week at school, the young minister decided he would leave the Seminary. He had enrolled because he was searching for God, and he had found Him, not at the Seminary but on a train ride home. Now, he had to decide what to do. Which path would he follow? There were many things to consider. It was one of those moments which carries with it eternal consequences, a crossroads of enormous importance to him and, eventually, to many others.

The rail lines ran through the middle of Ayden, with wide streets on either side of the tracks. The depot stood along the track in the center of town across the street from the courthouse. There was a chill in the air as Clarence, bags packed, walked the half-mile or so from the Seminary to the train station, not yet fully committed to his planned departure. He sat a long time on the bench near the ticket window without buying a ticket, a fierce debate raging in his soul. What would people say? He now had a reputation, not of a tough, callous sinner but of a good man, a promising young Baptist minister. People's expectations were high and they would now be dashed. His mind was still filled with these troubled thoughts when a distant whistle signaled the approach from the north of the passenger train from Greenville. The ticket master brusquely interrupted the young man's contemplation.

"Are you going to buy a ticket or not? You've been here long enough to already have one, and now the train's almost here."

It was time. Another crucial decision was made. Clarence went with his heart, bought his ticket, and boarded the train.

Even on the train, the conflict in his soul raged. As the train made its way southward to Kinston that day, he later would testify, Satan sat beside him and warned him, "They'll laugh at you. You quit your job with Swift Packing Company. Now you're quitting the Seminary. They'll all say that you're just a quitter and a failure at whatever you do!"

This was hard on the young man's spirit, but his feelings for God were strong. He had found what he wanted, and the Seminary had become an obstacle rather than an aid in obtaining it. He went with his feelings and went home.

When he arrived at the house, his wife, his mother, and others were there. They were all surprised that he had come home in the middle of the week, but he didn't give them time to ask anything. He walked in and announced boldly, "I am going to preach just as I am!" He was much relieved when they all voiced their approval. So, he continued as acting pastor to his Baptist congregation, but his full-time job now was seeking God. He also continued visiting

those home prayer meetings, and he spent every available moment questioning Brother Paramore concerning the way of holiness.



The railroad tracks still run through the center of Ayden toward Kinston to the south.

FEELINGS

Without being taught it, Clarence was doing what every soul must do to find peace with God; he followed his feelings. Conviction is a feeling, and there are only two courses available to the man whom God convicts of righteousness. He can either follow those feelings to come to Jesus for cleansing from sin, or he can quench those feelings with doctrines that tell him that he already possesses that to which the spirit of God is calling him. When Clarence boarded the train for Kinston, his mind was in turmoil, but his heart was not. He knew what he wanted, but how could he *explain* it to others? He knew that his feelings from God would be quenched if he continued at Ayden Seminary, but who other than holiness people could *understand* that? He could not explain himself any more than he could explain what God was doing in his life. But he loved what he was feeling from God.

Inexplicably, many Christian ministers admonish their congregations “not to go by feelings”, as if faith and life in the Spirit is a matter of the mind and will of man. There are few things stranger to the truth than the notion that one must ignore his feelings if he is to live by faith. Paul said that “*the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Ghost*” (Rom. 14:17), and according to that definition, two-thirds of the kingdom of God is something people feel. Again, Paul told the philosophers of Athens that men “*should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him*” (Acts 17:27). Only dead men don’t feel, and God uses the feelings of living men to guide them to Himself. The Psalmist’s song tells us that at God’s “*right hand there are pleasures forever more*” (Ps. 16:11). Does the same God who has pleasures at His right hand command men not to listen to their feelings as they walk with Him? Your feelings are your life. Listen to them! God is talking.

“I’LL NEVER DOUBT GOD AGAIN!”

As conviction grew in Clarence’s soul, his sermons changed, and as his sermons changed, they challenged even his own spirit. He preached with such conviction now that older members of the Baptist congregation frequently came to him after the services with tears in their eyes, saying, “Young man, we haven’t heard preaching like that since we were young.” Later in life, he would often remark that his own first real convert was himself. The burden for the holy Ghost was consuming him now, and everyone around him felt it – and understood it only a little less than he did.

Clarence received the experience that Pentecostal people called “the Blessing” one night when he was staying in the home of one of the deacons. It had been about six months since he first met Brother Paramore on the train ride home to Kinston. This night, he had already made up his mind that the very next day he was going out somewhere by himself and pray until God filled him with the same Spirit that he had seen work through Brother Paramore and the saints who were with him. He was earnestly praying that night, talking with the God he wanted to know. While praying, though, a nagging issue kept intruding into his communion with God. It was a controversy that had risen between him and a local business man. It seemed to hang over him like a cloud. He had done everything he could to make things right with God. He had done works “meet for repentance”, as John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul taught. But one irritating issue remained. The business man claimed that Clarence owed him twenty dollars. Clarence denied that, contending that he owed him but eighteen. The man wouldn’t take the eighteen, and Clarence wouldn’t give him the twenty, and both were too stubborn to budge from their positions.

Now, in the quiet darkness of the night, the whole issue boiled down to this: would Clarence surrender his hope of eternal life for two dollars? He could for a few moments push aside thoughts of the controversy and persist in prayer, sensing that he was “very near to the kingdom of God”. Still, though, he was convicted by the Voice that calls men to peace, not strife. As he prayed that night, the holy Spirit suddenly covered him with its power, and having never felt anything like it, he wondered if he was having a heart attack. Then the controversy over the two dollars again sprang up in his thoughts, interrupting his communion with Christ, and Clarence had to wrestle it back into submission before continuing in prayer. Then, as he resumed his praying, the Spirit came again upon him, frightening in its power and glory. He did not want to get out of bed because he feared that by doing so, he would disturb the deacon and his family who were sleeping just down the hallway. He admitted to himself, though, “If this happens again, I shall have to get up.” He continued to pray late into the night in the deacon’s home, then once again the controversy over two dollars interrupted his communion with God.

At last, he surrendered his will to an important truth; to wit, being willing to be wrong is the only way ever to be made right. The last thing Clarence did before the holy Ghost fell upon him in power was to cry out, “God, I’ll give him the twenty dollars!” When he made that promise to God, something like a heavy, warm quilt settled down upon him, covering him completely with heavenly power, and he was filled with the overwhelming, terrifying glory of God. Clarence began to speak aloud in a language he had never studied. He could not lie still.

He jumped out of bed and went down the hall speaking loudly in a beautiful language of the Spirit of God! He woke the whole house. And one glorious thought rang like bells in his heart as he went along: "I'll never doubt God again. I will never doubt God again!" Darwin's darkened imaginations were forever obliterated from his soul by the power of the living God in Christ Jesus.

The deacon in whose home Clarence received the Spirit had always told him straitly, as he had also told every other pastor who preached at his Baptist Church, never to call on him to pray. "I don't pray in public", he would insist. But he prayed that night, loud and long. When the deacon saw his pastor overcome with the glory of God, he fell in great fear of God upon his knees beside his bed and beat the mattress with both fists, crying out with great fervor, "God, have mercy on me! God, have mercy on me!"

In a short time, that deacon's wife and his children also received the baptism of the holy Ghost and, along with Clarence, were cast out of the Baptist Church. The deacon sought God for the baptism of the holy Ghost, but there was a problem, like Clarence's two-dollar problem. The deacon owned a store, and in his store, he sold cigarettes. At that time, Pentecostal people absolutely forbade any of their members to sell either tobacco products or alcoholic beverages. The deacon was faced, therefore, with the same choice Clarence had been forced by God to make: eternal life or money? Would the deacon keep the cigarettes in his store and keep his customers, or would he submit his soul to the government of the God and trust Him to supply his needs? Clarence surrendered his will to God and chose to pay the man the two dollars. The deacon chose the money.

I think of it sometimes even now. The harsh reality is that the deacon is probably in hell now. And for what? A little money while he lived. And where are his wife and children who trusted in God? In a better place, I hope. But if so, they will never see their husband and father again. How sad! How foolish it is to trade eternal life for earthly possessions of any kind, whether two dollars or two billion.

This is story about God.

ONLY FOR THE TWELVE

The day following Clarence's spirit baptism, news of the event spread quickly around town. Something remarkable had happened to the Free Will Baptist pastor while he was staying in the deacon's home. The deacon was telling everyone who came into his store that Reverend Clark had received the holy Ghost in his home the night before, including some other deacons and Pastor Wooten, the former pastor of the Baptist Church where Clarence was now ministering. They regularly came to the store on Monday mornings, and this morning, they got an earful of unexpected news.

Some of the people to whom the deacon told the story countered, "He was already a Christian. If he was a Christian, he had the Spirit before last night."

The deacon was adamant. "No, he got the Spirit last night." He knew what he had seen.

An elderly and highly respected deacon of the Baptist Church who heard the news that morning at the store came straightway to Clarence to reason with him and to rescue the young man from the error into which he had stumbled. The old deacon came to Clarence only to reprove and rescue, not to learn, and he had no interest whatsoever in listening to this young man's remarkable testimony, but Clarence wanted so much to tell of his glorious baptism with the Spirit of Christ.

When Clarence began to tell of his blessing from God, the elder interrupted him. He began to remind Clarence that he was still a young man and that he himself had the advantage of many years, and even more importantly, that for fifty long years he had been in the church, and he knew a few things about God.

Try as he may, Clarence was not able to persuade the elder of the Free Will Baptist faith to consider that what had happened was of God. Instead, the Baptist elder insisted that the experience of speaking in tongues had only been given to the twelve disciples of Jesus. At length, Clarence grew a little irritated with the old and foolish man and decided to show him, if he could, how silly he sounded to one who had been set free.

"So, it was only for twelve?" Clarence asked, only half-serious but with a somber face.

"Yes", said the deacon.

Clarence shook his head in pretended sadness and lamented, "I am so sorry to hear that. I thought for sure that the apostle Peter made it into the kingdom!"

The surprised elder shot back, "What?"

"I said, I thought surely Peter made it into the kingdom of God."

"Well, of course he did! What are you talking about?" demanded the deacon.

"Well, sir, you said that the baptism of the holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues was an experience given only to twelve men, right?"

"Yes, that is correct", the old man nodded.

"Well, if it is only for twelve, I know I am one of them because I received it last night! And if I'm one of them, then one of the twelve that followed Jesus must have lost out. I just figured it was Peter. He seemed so shaky at times."

About that time, the retired Pastor Wooten came in. He, too, began to warn Clarence about the disaster that he was about to make of his life. He personally knew, he claimed, a number

of otherwise good people who had fallen for that tongue-talking religion and who soon afterward had fallen into immorality. He grew passionate. “Son, demons know how to fool good people. We need to hold on to the truth! The forces of evil are many and they are cunning.” Then he continued with a detailed description of the sins into which Pentecostals become involved until the happy young man interrupted him with a question.

“Brother Wooten, are all of them like that? Do you know of anyone who ever received the holy Ghost and spoke in tongues who lived right afterwards?”

There was a moment’s hesitation. “Well, yes,” the retired pastor grudgingly admitted. “I have a cousin who was a pretty good man. He got into that tongue-talking mess.”

“How long did he last? Did he live right afterwards?”

“Well, yes, he seemed to,” replied the old man.

“Thank you, sir. I’m glad you said that. That’s all I need to know,” Clarence concluded. “I don’t care how many mean people get into it. I don’t care how many devils know anything. Just so you can be a good person, and live right, and live a clean life, and have this joy that I have, I’m not interested in who else comes or goes into it. If somebody can have this baptism that I received from Jesus last night and live right afterwards, that’s what I’m after.”

As the ignorant Christian minister and the aged deacon persisted in their arguments, Clarence listened impatiently, knowing that they both were expounding upon spiritual topics about which they knew nothing. When the aged deacon began to talk again. Clarence was finished with the conversation and so, concluded it by addressing the older man.

“Will you do me a favor, sir?” he asked. “The Bible says ‘it is appointed unto man once to die.’ Now, you’re an elderly man. According to the normal course of life, you’ll be dead in not too long a time. Someday, I’ll be gone too. I have listened to you, and now you listen to me. Both you and Pastor Wooten need what I received from Jesus, and I warn you that without it, you both will go to hell. But you’re telling me that you do not need it, and neither of us is willing to change what we now believe. So, there is no use in debating the issue any longer. But let me ask you this one thing before you leave. When we both stand before the Lord in the final Judgment and he rejects your unsanctified soul, will you be man enough to tell Jesus that I told you that the holy Ghost baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues was of God and that you rejected my testimony?”

That ended the conversation.

Local Baptist officials set in motion the procedures for officially casting Clarence out. At last, an appointed group came to his home and solemnly warned him that they were about to remove his name permanently from their roll. Someone among them, attempting no doubt to frighten him, suggested that excommunication was a serious judgment and that he might never be allowed into their fellowship again if he persisted in his error and forced them to excommunicate him.

Unmoved and a little angered by their stubborn refusal to listen to him, he replied, “Well if it’s permanent, hurry up and do it. I might backslide someday and want to come back.” Later, Clarence would admit to himself that he could feel that this sarcastic answer to their

threat of excommunication did not please the Lord, but for the moment he stood his ground. The insulted committee departed and Clarence argued with former Baptist colleagues no more. They had done all they could do for him, and he had done all that he could do for them. So, the Baptist Church cast out Clarence as unclean, as all mainline Christian denominations did to anyone in those days whom God baptized with the holy Ghost and fire.

But the pressures did not cease. Many of Clarence's family members and friends found themselves sorrowing for him again; they saw little difference between him angrily quitting his good job with Swift Packing and happily quitting his good job as pastor of the Baptist Church. Family members, embarrassed by his association with the lowly Church of God people, pleaded with him, "You don't have to throw yourself away just because you get religion!"

"Oh, yes," he would answer, "you do have to throw yourself away. Jesus said that if you don't hate your own life, you are unfit for the kingdom of God!"

In their opinion, Clarence this time had not only made another mess in his life but had also brought a reproach on theirs. His mother persuaded the family doctor to come examine Clarence (more on this in the next chapter) to see if perhaps something had gone terribly wrong in his mind. That is not as surprising to me, however, as is his willingness to let the doctor examine him. One gets the feeling that he was so happy that he was even enjoying the opposition and was willing to take on the whole world.

Some of his Baptist friends who really did love him wept for him and the embarrassing religion to which he was now devoted, but he continued serving the Lord in all gladness of heart, thankful to have received something from God that finally gave him comfort. He had somehow survived the pain of losing Maude without God's comfort for several years, and he was not about to turn from it now that he had it in his soul. By the grace of God, he learned that there is no sorrow on earth so great that the joy of heaven cannot cover it. No earthly sorrow is greater than heaven's holy comfort. God had come to his rescue, and Clarence was willing to suffer whatever reproaches ignorant men might heap upon him as long as he possessed the one thing that saved him from the pain.