

Bricks for Sale

By
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A bright, helpful story, with a happy ending, about a family that rose out of squalor and poverty to a place of influence and spiritual blessing in their community. Drink, with its trials and heartaches, had taken its toll and left this family of five destitute. The young daughter finally won her father's heart to try religion, and the resulting transformation of his life and recouping of the family fortunes is the heartening point of the book.

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1. MARTHA ELLEN CARRIES THE BURDEN

HE HAS bricks for sale. Peter has. Well, what's so unusual about that? Every builder in town has bricks for sale. Peter has bricks for sale.

With much figuring and thinking and pouring forth of his soul in prayer, Peter found out that if he sold each brick for a shining silver quarter, it would finance the building of the church in Rama, Indiana.

Blubbering old drunks in Pitman's Landing have often speculated amazedly on the "change in Pete." He used to be one of their confederates, in on all of their shady depredations, but now he has been spoiled by the church and will never be a "jolly good fellow" again.

"Why, he used to carry his liquor like a man!" one would ejaculate with some show of regret. His nose was a big red blimp, and his eyeballs had red threads in them.

"Yes," answered another. "Pete, he was a good fellow. Now, you can't touch him with a ten-foot pole."

But the object of their regrets and speculations is little troubled by their reminiscences. He is an expert electrician and a high-tension lineman. His services are highly valued by his company. He earns an excellent salary.

It would seem that Pete and his wife would live in a fine big house down at the "Landing," where others in his social position have bought solid, substantial homes. But not Pete.

He went into an outlying country district and rented a house there. The front room was fixed up first into as neat a little chapel as you could ever see. As clean as the inside of a shell. Pete's clever big hands had fashioned the pews from clean new lumber. Martha Ellen had stained and varnished them. The maroon runner was bought from Montgomery Ward, and Martha Ellen's own cabinet grand piano stood ready in the corner. On the very first Sunday of their residence there, Pete had gone to pay visits to his neighbors to invite them to meeting.

"Meeting?" one asked. "Where? We haven't had a church house in this town for many a long year. Those that are church minded always drive in to Pitman's Landing on a Sunday."

The first Sunday night the room was crammed with a curious, friendly crowd. The front seat was crowded with children, eager and watchful.

Pete, welcoming them at the door, felt a real pang of responsibility. He must, oh, he just must have something good for them. The time came to start. Pete passed out the hymnbooks. Martha Ellen went to the

piano. That was how it started.

Bricks for sale. Twenty-five cents each.

In order to see the whole thing as it really happened, we shall have to jump lightly backward over the years. You take my hand. Here we are. Summer of 1918.

Peter and Martha Ellen Johnson lived in a cottage in Pitman's Landing, Indiana. They had one little daughter and two small boys.

Did I say lived"? Pardon me. I misspoke. I mean they "existed" in a mean, tumble-down hovel hardly fit for pigs to live in, much less human beings. None of the little confidences of laughter over the children's cuteness, of loving differences one to another, were seen there. Mother and father were not even friends.

Although Pete earned an excellent and adequate salary, his family did not know it. Food was uncertain. Clothes were rags—a patch on a patch and a hole in the middle. Harsh words and bitter quarrels were to be endured daily. And the children, poor little scared rabbits, learned to run and hide themselves when they heard his unsteady step on the gravel walk.

Why?

Because Peter was bound with many chains to an inordinate and all-consuming thirst—a thirst for the gratification of which he paid out his money, his children's food and clothing, his own happiness, his wife's love, and left nothing where there might have been plenty.

One would think that Pete's dissolute habits would have rendered him unfit to do his work for the electric company. Perhaps they might have, if Peter hadn't taken so much pride in his work. He might guzzle and drink all evening, and spend his money for that which was not meat or drink, but he was proud of his record of punctuality at his work. At that time it was the only virtue the man possessed.

One day he had an assignment to repair some wires which had become tangled and broken in a terrific windstorm. The poles were down in the slum district where the streets were narrow and littered. A great pile of used bricks lay nearby, and a crowd of greasy workmen were engaged in cleaning them and stacking them up.

Pete peered up the pole in question. In a moment he saw the trouble. Then he gathered the needed tools, hitched up his safety strap, and climbed the pole as neatly as a cat would. He was busy with his wire snips when he heard a faint crackling sound far below. Nearly paralyzed with fright, he looked down. The pole had been damaged by the wind, and was breaking off even with the ground. In that terrible instant Pete's wicked heart plunged with horrible fear and misgiving. He uttered two words—too solemn to be an oath, too fearful to be a prayer; "Oh! God!"

The ground seemed to whirl about dizzily for a long interval; then it came swimming up to meet him. A sensation of floating came over him. He tried to kick loose from his belt. A blinding flash seemed almost to burst his brain. Then oblivion. Blessed oblivion—shot sometimes with breathtaking, terrible stabs of pain, but a darkness curtained and muffled in black velvet.

Martha Ellen and the children didn't miss Pete's earnings while he was laid up. Indeed, they were much better off than they had been before. The company sent Mrs. Johnson a weekly check called "compensation." It was far more than she had been accustomed to seeing in a month. Moreover, Pete was held down in bed with great chunks of plaster casts, moved by a curious maneuvering of pulleys on the ceiling. Pete couldn't go to the liquor store or to the gambling den. He fumed and frothed at the fate that chained him to his bed for eleven hideous months in the hospital.

Peter seemed singularly mild to Martha Ellen these days. Martha Ellen felt in her heart that she could almost love him if he stayed away from liquor. That was what made him so mean. She knew that.

After a time, the casts were removed, and Pete was taken home. He was pale and thin from his long confinement, and he knew it would be months before he would be able to go back to work.

He had to learn to walk all over again. He would work himself painfully across the floor to supper, holding on to walls, chairs, and other furniture.

“You’ll be a hopeless cripple, Johnson, if you favor yourself,” the physician had said. ‘Walk every day’. It will be extremely hard at first. But you can stand it; I know you can!”

When Pete’s compensation checks ceased coming, poverty confronted them again. It was plain that the man was not able to work yet—perhaps never would be. Martha Ellen saw that if the kettle were to boil, she must provide not only the wood, but the wherewithal for the kettle.

With her characteristic willingness and thoroughness, she searched out a job for herself.

All day she worried about her children as she guided the pricking needle into the coarse denim at the pants factory. For eight hours she sat bowed and tense over the machine, her back and her head aching miserably, to bring home a starvation wage.

The little ones, in rags and patches, were watching for her every evening and would run to meet her on skinny little legs when they espied her coming. They always had pitiful little adventures or childish wonders and triumphs to relate to her.

“Guess what, Mother!” Little John looked up at her from wide, wise eyes.

“What, sugar?” Mother held the thin little hand, fiercely possessive, as they neared the house.

“I washed the dishes today, I did. Sister, her put up a chair. And I cut myself!” Here, he proudly displayed an elaborately bandaged thumb.

“Why! Bless my boy’s heart!” exclaimed Martha Ellen in her rich, full voice, vibrant with mother love. “He’s my regular little man!”

Then Richard clutched at her dragged skirt, eager for notice, for attention himself. “Guess what, Mother!” he said.

“What did you do, Dicky boy?” Mother’s warm brown eyes were caressing him solicitously, and he flushed with a little bubble of pleasure.

“Verna, she churned today,” stated the little boy gleefully. “I sold the buttermilk over at Mrs. Arnold’s place, an’ wee bought corn meal. There are just the best corndodgers you ever saw for supper!”

“Isn’t that grand?” praised mother. “Hello, Verna, girl. Tired out? Mother will take hold of things now.” Tenderly she greeted the thin little girl, flushed from working over the hot stove. The doors and windows were open, for it had been a hot day.

“No, no, Mother! You sit and rest. No, get washed up. Supper is almost ready.”

She spoke mechanically, but she was smiling a little wearily. It was good to have dear mother at home. She pulled a black iron pot from its place over the fire, replaced the stove lid, and started to dish up thick, rich vegetable soup into an old-fashioned square ironstone dish.

Then little John, hungry and eager, took it upon himself to call his father. He was in the garden. Seemed as if he was always in the garden lately—digging and weeding and pruning and pulverizing.

“Father! Father!” he called in a high, little-boy treble. “Come to supper. We have got onions and soup an’ the best corn bread!”

From the mellow richness of the soil, the man Pete Johnson rose. He gave a proud, proprietary look over the expanse of his garden. He had undertaken this when he could hardly crawl over the ground. There was not a weed anywhere. The soil was perfectly pulverized, and his vegetables looked as if they had been hand raised in a greenhouse.

Stiffly and painfully he made his way toward the house and supper.

“Hello, Mother,” Pete greeted his wife.

“Hello.”

She hardly had a glance for him. Tired out and wearied till her very soul cried out for rest and peace, she couldn’t help blaming the man whose selfishness had robbed her children and herself of a full and pleasant life. There was still enmity and distrust in her heart. Pete had never given her reason for

anything else. All these years there had been drunkenness and bickering and faultfinding. There had been leanness and poverty when there might have been plenty. And without the sunlight of understanding and peace, and earnest solicitations, the fragile little plant called "love" will wither away and die. And so it had died in the heart of Martha Ellen.

2. A WILD GOOSE CHASE

WHEN THE fall winds were blowing off the great river, and cutting like a knife through Verna's thin little coat, Pete suddenly decided to move his family to Kansas City, Missouri. Martha Ellen was furious, but Pete was "head of the house," and what he said must go. He had an offer of a job in a great factory in that city. His cousin had secured the job for him.

With a high hand, he summoned the secondhand man and disposed of their wretched household effects "for a song." His wife looked on and listened in trepidation. What was to become of them? Here, if things got too hard, she could always work at the pants factory. What could she find to do in that great city?

Well might Martha Ellen be timorous of the future. She had further and greater trials to undergo in which she was to be convinced that Pete did not have a single grain of good in him; that liquor took the very heart out of the man.

He got his job, and settled his family in a basement room. The windows, the stove, and the linoleum all were cracked. Dicky had to lug coal in from a ramshackle shed near the alley.

There were a cupboard, a smoky, stubborn kerosene stove of an ancient manufacture, the coal heating stove, a table, two beds, and a cot. They could hardly get around, the room was so crowded. But it was clean. In front of the tiny, inadequate windowpanes were hung snowy but threadbare curtains. The cupboard, as bare as the legendary one of "Old Mother Hubbard," always had its cracked and nicked crockery and blackened cutlery in perfect order.

The children found their way through milling traffic to school. There they found heartbreak enough, too, poor little things. One day Dicky came home, his fine little sensitive face stained with tears.

"Mother, they just made fun o' me all day. They went an' called my shoes 'boats' and called me 'skipper.' The kids laughed and pointed. Oh, Mother, Mother, it was terrible."

Four-year-old John, looking like a little old man in his cut-down clothes, doubled up his tiny fists. His big eyes shone black with fraternal loyalty.

"Why didn't you just pound them, Dicky? I would. I would go with you tomorrow. I would hit them hard." He illustrated just how he would do by a series of ineffectual punches on a bed pillow.

But Mother Martha Ellen, sick at heart, knew that the children would laugh at sober, sensitive little Dicky until she could replace the huge pair of men's shoes which he was wearing with a pair that fit him. That night she scanned the "Help Wanted" columns. Her heart was sick with worry. What would she do with little John if she got a job? She couldn't leave him alone with the fire. He would get hurt someway. Back in Pitman's Landing, some kindly-disposed neighbor was always willing to help. Here, there were no such things as neighbors.

At last she located a day nursery, run by a group of charitable women, where John could stay for ten cents a day. At noon he would be given a luncheon of graham crackers and milk and a ripe banana. John liked it there.

She had a different job every day. Monday, she washed clothes and cleaned for Mrs. Van Storm on Willard Avenue. Tuesday, she worked for an employed couple in an uptown apartment. Wednesday, she cleaned a doctor's office. Thursday-well, Martha Ellen was busy at day work all the time. She dared not tell Pete. He would take her money from her to waste and to gamble if he could.

New shoes, new clothes, had to be hidden and old ones donned when father came home. Little John mustn't say one word about the beautiful day nursery where he had so much fun every day. He looked wise when mother warned him, and was as discreet as the next one when father came stumbling home.

"Mush!" Pete would shout irritably. "Corn-meal mush! Is that all a workingman gets when he comes home dead tired, and hungry?"

Martha Ellen could be soft-spoken then. Her children had eaten a good supper an hour before, and all vestiges of their pleasant little collation had been cleared away.

"Pete," she would answer, "you haven't given me a cent for groceries since Monday night. We can't live on that fifty cents unless I buy the cheapest thing there is to buy. That's corn meal. The children ought to have milk and vegetables, too, and bread."

Pete would grudgingly hand her a dollar or two, but it was always with some unkind comment.

What would he have said if he had known that far back in the cupboard hidden in a box were all kinds of good foods for her children? She had bought them. There were oranges, golden and juicy; bananas, rich and yellow; raisins; oatmeal; and butter. There was even a case of canned goods that she had carefully selected. Peas, corn, tomatoes, and hominy. And pineapple. Little John loved it with sliced oranges. Bless his heart. It was worth all the hard hours of backbreaking labor to bring these pleasures to her children. She managed to get them shoes, too. And sturdy corduroys.

For Verna, she got neat little print dresses, which she laundered beautifully each week.

But all this had to be kept from father, because drink had made him into a being who existed solely for his own interests and pleasures. Sometimes Martha Ellen wondered wearily why she “put up with him” at all. Nothing but dead weight. No good to anyone. That was how she truthfully summed up her husband. That was part of what made his later regeneration by Christ’s precious blood such a marvelous, amazing thing. He really became something made from nothing.

Pete came home in an ugly mood one Saturday. As good fortune would have it, Martha Ellen was not working that day; so her little secret remained inviolate. She hurriedly turned out the fire, though. She was making a good fruit soup of prunes and apricots and raisins, dear to her children’s palates. She had minced up a delicious apple into it, and Johnny had sniffed the air in delight.

“Oh, Mother! When will it be done?” he had cried out ecstatically just before Pete had flung open the door and effected an entrance.

How was Martha Ellen to know that he had been fired from his job and that he was very angry? At any rate, as was his habit, he took it out on his family.

“Begin to get packed up!” he bawled out, as soon as he entered. “I’m going to get out of this town!” Then he began to curse the town, the people in general, and his boss in particular.

“Be still, Father!” Martha Ellen commanded sternly with more spirit in her voice than Pete had ever heard her use before. Quite aghast at her boldness, Pete looked at her in amazed silence.

“You know you have no business talking in such a way before our little children. Now, don’t you let me hear you using such language again!”

Pete took another tack.

“Well, then, all right. Guess it doesn’t do any good to swear about it. But I lost my job. The boss is entirely too particular. I was just a matter of an hour late two or three times lately, and he let me go. Now we’re going back to Pitman’s Landing. I might even get my old job back with the electric company. My legs are practically well now.”

Then a dirty secondhand man came down to the stark basement apartment and began to hawk out outrageously cheap offers for their meager belongings. They argued and bickered, Pete and he each trying to see who could yell the louder. At last they came to terms grudgingly, and a terribly ramshackle old wagon, with the wheels pointing off on the oblique, drew up to their door. A bony old horse drooped patiently in the shafts, switching a sparse old tail apathetically, his very inertia making the hitch weight seem redundant. The room was cleaned out at last, and they were at the station waiting for the train.

The family were heading back to Indiana without so much as a stick of furniture to their name. Their clothing was meager and very plain. Martha Ellen wondered frequently what they would ever have done if she had not gone out and worked. Even now the children were wearing the clothes she had bought for them. But Pete had not noticed. He was too selfish.

She had packed a lunch for the children. She let them eat it when Pete lounged into the smoker to get thoroughly fumigated anew with nicotine. They ate hurriedly, like scared little rabbits. There were peanut-butter sandwiches and cottage cheese ones with raisins and nuts. Then there were two marshmallow cookies apiece, and a banana.

To Martha Ellen, going back to Pitman’s Landing was no joy. It was the same old story of squalor and mean living unless she herself left her little children and took a hand in the wage earning. The worry in Martha Ellen’s heart was habitual. What to do, what to do, what to do.

The wheels seemed to take up the chant of her weary brain and to fling the words back at her. The rhythm of the wheels was like the rhythm of her thoughts. And her worry was tinged with bitterness toward the man whose selfishness and appetite were ruining her life.

When they arrived at the pretty little town perched timorously near the great Ohio River, Pete could hardly wait to get off the train to go purchase for himself a drink of liquor. The sun was going down. They had no place to stay, and both of the little boys were crying with weariness and hunger. Their faces were gritty and streaked with soot and tears. A sordid life was Martha Ellen’s, as she waited on a corner,

homeless, weary, and exasperated to the depths of her soul.

At last Pete returned and took them to a cheap, dirty hotel for the night. The place smelled like the memories of a thousand different brands of cigars, cigarettes, and chewing tobacco mingled with rancid grease, boiled cabbage, cheap, under-cooked meat, and perspiration. There were in the room a sagging, broken-arched bed with grayish-looking bedclothes, a washstand, and a bureau. The carpet, the pattern of which resembled a succession of sickish-looking doughnuts marching in a platoon across a yellowish-red background, was worn to shreds. The curtains were gray and ropy looking. The room looked and smelled as unsavory as its whole procession of former occupants indubitably had been. Pete got them settled; then he went down and bought them some crackers and cheese.

“Is this all we get, Father?” Mother’s voice was sharp and edged with sarcasm.

Pete looked up quickly from tearing open the paper bags untidily at the table.

“It’s enough, isn’t it?” His tone was belligerent and loud. He intended to humble Martha Ellen back into submission. He couldn’t have her talking back as she had been lately. But Martha Ellen looked him straight in the eye.

“No, it is not, Pete Johnson. We need something hot and filling. This kind of thing doesn’t set well on the stomach at bedtime. The children shan’t touch it. They ought to have soup and milk and fruit and gravy bread—”

But Pete had flung himself out of the room with an oath, and had left them alone. Martha Ellen knew where he would go, and that he would stay a long time; so she felt free to go down and buy milk for her children. Then she opened up her suitcase and took out the rest of the sandwiches.

After the children had eaten, Verna cleaned things up and laid out their night clothes while Martha Ellen washed the boys. She poured water out into the bowl, and washed little John first. He leaned against her knee, his sweet blue eyes misty with sleep. Then she turned back the spread and laid him crossways between the dingy sheets. With a weary little sigh, he snuggled into a little animate ball and was sound asleep.

The next day Pete found them a house near the one in which they had lived before. He went to a secondhand store and bargained for the cheapest and most unattractive of essentials. He left Verna and Martha Ellen to do the cleaning and arranging while he lounged off to hunt a job.

There was no opening at the electric company; so Pete had to go the rounds several days before he found work. By that time the beds were up, the trunks were unpacked, and life had begun to drone on as usual for them all. Martha Ellen obtained her old backbreaking job in the pants factory. Pete found a job as night watchman in a tool shop.

Martha Ellen’s patience was at an end, and she refused to endure the unkind treatment which formerly she had suffered so meekly. There were quarrels—horrid, bitter, vituperative.

At last one day Martha Ellen would endure it no longer. She packed up Pete’s old threadbare clothes and put them outside. When he came home that night, she wouldn’t let him in.

“You can just take your clothes and go, Pete Johnson,” she had shouted through the door. “I pay the rent on this house. I feed and clothe these little children with the money I earn at the pants factory. Now, you get out and go.”

After trying ineffectually for about half an hour to effect an entrance, he slouched off up the street. Then Martha Ellen put on her hat and went down to the police headquarters and had a restraining order put on her husband, so that he could molest neither her nor her children. Grimly, she came home to shoulder the burden of supporting her little children. It would be easier than with Pete, she comforted herself. But her heart was saddened nonetheless. She was only human, and had longed for a full and happy life. Pete had been so merry and handsome when he was courting her. If only he didn’t drink!

3. VERNA POINTS THE WAY

ONE DAY while Verna was attacking her morning tasks with her usual interested energy, a knock was heard at the front door. In a long, trailing apron, she answered the summons. It was a kindly old man.

“Is your mother at home, my child?”

“No, she isn’t. She works every day at the pants factory. I keep house.” Verna said this a little proudly.

“Then I will talk to you. I am the minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church down the street. You

know, the brick one with the ivy growing up the tower? I have stopped to invite you to come to Sunday school.”

He looked at her so kindly that the child’s heart was melted. He was such a friendly-looking man, with a strong but gentle face.

“What time does it begin?” she faltered, blinking.

“Next Sunday morning at nine-thirty,” he answered pleasantly. “Now, remember, I am going to be watching for you. I will miss you if you do not come.”

“I’ll be there,” Verna replied huskily, smiling up into his face. “Will it be all right if I bring my little brothers? John is four and Richard is six.”

“Oh, yes, bring them by all means,” he hastened to assure her. “We have fine kindergarten and primary departments. They will enjoy them, I know they will.”

Then the old man was gone, and the day seemed brighter to the little girl. Shrewdly she began to analyze the situation. Maybe that was why their home was broken, and why mother and father were having such a hard time—because they weren’t trying to live right. Well, mother was, but father—why, the only things wrong with him were his drinking and gambling. And if he ever could be prevailed upon to join a church, he would break these habits. Good church members didn’t do those things. Of that, Verna was convinced. In her little trusting way of seeking an analysis, the girl had struck at the very root of their deepest troubles.

Sunday morning she washed her little brothers carefully and put clean, mended clothes on them. With a sigh she looked down at their little bare feet.

“I do wish you boys had some shoes,” she regretfully mused. “But we can’t help it that you haven’t. Be careful and don’t kick up a big dust on the way to church, and maybe your feet will stay clean.”

And so they had gone, wistful and expectant. Everyone was kind to them. And the minister even smiled at Verna, and she knew by that that he had noted her coming, and her heart gave a joyous little bound. She determined to make this churchgoing a regular thing.

Many of the children trooped away after Sunday school, but not Verna. Even the little boys enjoyed the diversion, and sat very quietly during the sermon.

The text was, “Consider the lilies . . . how they grow.” The minister went on to draw a beautiful lesson from God’s care of the flowers and of the little creatures of field and wood. If God cares for them, and even notices when a sparrow falls, how much more likely He is to care for His dear children, if they but have faith!

Verna, listening, determined to acquire in some way that spiritual ingredient. Her little heart was lifted up and pulsating with the urge to do right, no matter what it would cost.

Every once in a while Pete came lurching around when he knew that Martha Ellen was not at home to drive him off. He was uncommonly loving and solicitous of his children on these occasions, ostensibly to alienate their affections from their mother. He always cried after he came in and sat down.

Little John and Richard were wary of him, for the memory of cuffs and kicks was still green in their shrewd little minds.

His breath smelled like a brewery, and he looked more doddering and unkempt every time he came. Verna’s heart ached for him, for she was a motherly girl, and hated to see dirt and neglect. Yet she was wise beyond her years, and she knew that they were better off without father.

Father brought her money, too—more than he had ever contributed while he was living with them; Five dollars, sometimes ten dollars.

“Do you love your old dad, little girl?” he would ask as he watched her thin, expressive little face.

“Yes, yes, Father, I do. I love you, and I wish you lived here.”

“Do you? Do you?” he would query, incredulously. His eyes clung to her face pleadingly. Poor thing, thought Verna, maternally, he wants someone to love him most terribly bad. But here Verna’s heart seemed filled with woe. If father would only—

“But, Father—” Verna hesitated, not wishing to offend, yet knowing down in her honest heart that she must indeed tell him the truth. “Father, you’d be the best daddy in all the world, if only you didn’t—” “Didn’t what, darling?” His voice trembled.

Verna had been leaning against his knee, running her fingers caressingly through his rough thatch of hair. He had one arm about her. Now she burst into a very torrent of weeping, and he drew her down on his knee.

“Didn’t what, darling?” he repeated.

She buried her face in his coat. Her little shoulders shook with convulsive sobs that racked her

slender frame. He patted her coarse little dress.

It was a long time before she could quiet her sobs enough to answer him. Then she sat up and dabbed at her swollen eyes ineffectually.

“Didn’t drink, Father. Oh, I hate it so! And our minister up at the church says it isn’t right, either. Says a drunkard won’t ever inherit the kingdom. And-and-and, Father, I figured that out, too, myself. It breaks up homes—it has broken up ours!”

She began to sob again. Pete held her tight and caressed her heaving little shoulders.

Strange thoughts were chasing around in his slow brain, like rats in a trap. Why—why, it was the liquor. It was, indeed. Why couldn’t he quit drinking? It wasn’t worth this little angel’s tears. He was a dog. That’s what he was. Not worth the powder and the buckshot it would take to get his hide. Poor little girl here! Didn’t know she was nothing but a bag of bones! Just the liquor, that was all! He’d quit it.

The words of love came strangely now to Peter’s lips. He was much more used to irony and biting sarcasm—to epithets, cursing, and filthy words. The tears stood in his eyes, and he continued to mumble and talk to her in a soft voice.

“There now. There. Father’s little pretty. Bless her sweet heart anyway. Yes, yes, darling. It’s father’s fault. Oh, why didn’t I know? Why didn’t I wake up and know that I was breaking my angel girl’s little tender heart?”

“Come on, now, come on, darling! Dry those pretty eyes! Let me look. Smile now. Smile for father. Why! Bless my girl! She looks like a rainbow when she smiles through her tears!”

Then, seated on his knee, her little hands still trembling and her breath still catching convulsively with the memory of her sobs, Verna told Pete in her own sweet little way that she had decided to be a good girl now, and to serve the Lord as best she could.

“And next Sunday morning, Father, I am going to be baptized. There will be eight of us. We are going to be dressed in white. Mother has made my dress.

“Father,” she added softly, I wish you’d come and see me baptized. Mother can’t go. She’s got to clean the house that day, she says.”

Her tone was so wistful that Pete couldn’t resist, though he hadn’t been inside a church for years.

“I’ll be there, my darling!” he assured her warmly. “I be right on hand, and I’ll buy you a posy, too, to pin on your dress. Father wouldn’t miss that for anything.”

Verna and a group of her young friends were baptized the next Sunday.

Verna, up on the platform, sought out her father’s face. It was sagging pitifully, but he didn’t take his eyes off the little girl up in front. Strange things had happened to him since he had gone over to see her last Wednesday. He had come away from there badly shaken. In fact, he hadn’t had anything upset him so in his whole life.

And he hadn’t drunk a drop of liquor since then, either. Not a drop! And he had worked like a horse at his job. The boss even stopped and asked him what was up, and praised him, too. Even now Pete warmed at his words.

“Keep this kind of thing up, Johnson, and you’re due for a raise. That’s the way I like to see men work.”

The service was sweet and beautiful, and Pete couldn’t keep from crying. Every word the minister said seemed to be aimed at him.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”

“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning.”

Then the man in the pew began to examine himself. He could not help it. There was something compellingly accusing about those gentle verses. For the first time, Pete really sized himself up with a view to doing something about it. He had—unknown to himself, of course, for he hadn’t stopped to analyze his feelings—taken two steps toward the kingdom, conviction and contrition. The sense of his sin was overpowering. He felt that he would give his strong right arm to be rid of the dreadful, terrible weight. But the minister’s voice went on. All those verses weren’t accusing. Some of them seemed to point to a possible way out.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore, the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure.”

Then a feeble little ray of hope shone down on the barren desert of Pete's heart. There was a way out. The preacher had read it there in the Book. He'd get a Bible, that's what he'd do, and read how to go about it. Then he would "purify himself," just as the preacher had said. Maybe then he'd be fit to—to go home and live with Martha Ellen and the children.

After the services the old minister came down and mingled with his congregation familiarly and happily. He had a kindly personal word and a warm handclasp for every person there. He even sought out Pete to welcome him.

"Say, parson," Pete said, swiftly, "you don't have an extra Bible anywhere around here that you'd like to sell, do you? I haven't got one, and I'd like mighty well to read those Bible verses again that you read today."

"No, brother," replied the good man. I have none to sell. But I have one here that I will give you. Someone left it in the church long ago, and I cannot find to whom it belongs." And he laid in Pete's hands a fine, well-bound copy of the Holy Scriptures.

From then on the saloons knew Pete no more. Very soon he went over to see Martha Ellen. He came in the evening right after the dishes were washed. Martha Ellen was disturbed when she saw him coming. She had had no inkling of his change of heart.

"What in the world is Pete coming here for?" she said, peering through the curtains, watching him draw nearer. "Well, I can thank fortune for one thing," she added. "He is not drunk."

He came in very humbly. Verna saw that he had shaved and brushed his clothes carefully. Her heart ached with pity for him. But Martha Ellen was sharp and harsh with him.

"But I am a changed man," he assured her anxiously. "I haven't been near a saloon for two weeks now. I never did go that long before, as you well know. I'm not worth anything, I know; but I'll never, never drink another drop of liquor."

"Oh, yes?" she retorted scathingly. "Well, I don't believe a word of it. You haven't got a single grain of good in you, and never did have."

I know it. I know it. It's all too true. I don't blame you a bit for hating me. I've never given you any reason to feel any other way. Just the same, I wish you'd give me a chance to show you that I'm a real man."

He sat there so patiently and regarded her so wistfully that Martha Ellen was puzzled. Was this change in Pete honest, or was it another ruse to deceive her? They were getting on fairly well now, and Martha Ellen was loath to change, lest she should make her situation worse. She had had her fill of Pete's empty promises. She could not make herself believe in him. But Yet—even his tone of voice was changed. He was a stranger. This couldn't be Pete, who was always so ready with his fists and his curses.

At the last she gave in grudgingly. The next day he came back with his clothes bulging out of a ramshackle old suitcase.

"Now, you quit your job," he advised her. "I'll take care of the expenses from now on."

"Yes, like fun, I will," jeered his wife. "I'll wait till I'm sure that this spell of yours is genuine, before I give up my good job. I've got a promotion, too. The superintendent says I'm in line to be forelady of our part of the shop, and that position pays a good salary."

"Just as you think, my dear," he said, patiently. "Remember, I don't blame you for not believing me. I haven't been a good husband. That I know. But I'm going to make it up to you, my dear, for all those lost years."

When Martha Ellen reached home with her own check at the end of the week, she nearly fainted when Pete handed his check to her, uncashed.

"What's this for?" she inquired, the blood rushing to her face.

"Why, it is my check. I endorsed it. Take it and use it."

She regarded him suspiciously. "How much do you want out of it?" she asked curiously.

"Why, none. That is, if you'll fix me a lunch to carry. I get so tired of restaurants. They charge a good deal, too. And the restaurant there by the shop serves food that tastes like dishwater."

After that Martha Ellen began to be convinced that Pete really was different. "But it won't last!" she prognosticated, sagaciously.

At the end of three weeks Martha Ellen decided that she had tested Pete long enough. It was pretty hard to work and keep house, too; so, without too many misgivings, she gave up her job. Pete had been after her to do so every week. He was even solicitous of her, lest she ruin her health working too hard. That was a joke. Pete, of all people!

So she gave up her job and began to keep house, and for the first time she took a certain amount of

pride and pleasure in it.

New things began to appear. A new oil cloth for the table. A set of teacups. A bedspread. Some new pillow slips. A clock. Martha Ellen was frugal, but she saw the necessity of having an attractive home. Pete was overjoyed at every purchase, and always commended her warmly on her choice. It looked pathetic to see him fingering a pillowcase, examining lace, or turning over a teacup to enjoy its design. Occasionally he mentioned something to her that he hoped to have to make their home more pleasant.

Pete came home from work at about six in the morning. The children were usually asleep, but a good breakfast was always awaiting him. The aroma of hot biscuits and gravy, so dear to the Hoosier palate, even came down the street a way to meet him.

And it was always so pleasant to creep between Martha Ellen's snowy sheets, and drift off to dreamland. The whole room seemed to make him sleepy. Even the gentle waving to and fro of the curtains had a certain peaceful rhythm that made his eyes close in spite of themselves. Often, often, he lay there and reflected on life, how he was so much happier since he had awakened to a new and happier stage of it. His heart would seem to drain away in pity when he thought of the lean and bitter years and of the wicked life he had led. Verna had led him back, bless her pure little heart. And the Book. And the Book.

Then he would be asleep.

4. PETE FINDS A FRIEND

PETE HAD been taking his Bible every night when he went to his work, and reading it. He had time to snatch a few chapters in between rounds. It was interesting to read about those old fellows who lived so many years ago. Why, they made the same mistakes that we do, almost. There were David, and Solomon, and Samuel, and Elisha. Reading about them was just like getting acquainted with a whole crowd of new friends.

It was when Pete got into the books of the prophets over on the other side of the Psalms that he began to get puzzled. The stories were so interesting that he could hardly let them alone; yet he could see that he needed someone to explain them to him. It was a bit disheartening to know that there was some rich meaning in a text which he himself could not find. He wished he had someone who understood the Bible to read with him and explain the passages that puzzled him.

When Pete was not making his round, he stayed in the tool room, and it was a part of his duty to hand tools out to the workmen. He had to keep a written record of each tool taken, who took it, and when, so that it could be traced in case of loss. He had a dilapidated old rocking chair padded with canvas, and a desk in which he kept his keys and records. He had a round hole cut in the door through which the men could call and make known their needs to him. Here he could sit for as long as twenty or thirty minutes, reading and studying the beautiful stories of the Bible. But whenever Pete heard anyone coming up the corridor, he hid the Bible under a welter of old newspapers in a box. He knew that the men in the shop would never get through laughing if they saw him reading a Bible. Fellows in the shop just didn't go in for things like that.

But Pete got so wrapped up in one of the stories one evening that he didn't hear footsteps. The workman stood there looking at him through the hole for some little time before he spoke.

"What is it that you're reading, Pete?"

Pete jumped as though he had been shot, and hastily hid the Book in a newspaper on the table.

"No, no, don't hide it. It's a Bible, isn't it? Well, why hide it? Nothing to be ashamed of that I can see. I've read and studied in the Bible a great deal. Still do, for that matter."

Pete grinned a little shamefacedly.

"Well, Joe, you see, not many of the fellows feel the way you do about it. Most of them would have a big laugh at my expense.

"Oh, I know that!" Joe was serious. "I've been laughed at many a time. But, say, Pete, I can show you some things there in the Bible that you'd be surprised to know are there. That Book tells the future. Why, I know for a certainty just how things are going to wind up here in this old world. But I can't stand here and talk Scripture on company time. We'll get together and study sometime if you want to. What I want now is a Stillson wrench and two medium-sized cold chisels."

Pete selected the tools and recorded them. As he passed them through the little hole, he remarked wistfully, "If you understand anything about the Bible, Joe, you're the very man I'm looking for. When can we get together?"

Joe seemed as eager to study as Pete did.

“Tell you what, Pete,” he suggested, “I’ll come up here and read with you at midnight after we’ve eaten our lunches. We can get a great deal done even in a little bit of time.”

“Why, thanks, Joe. I’ll count on that. See you at midnight.”

Pete rapidly ate his sandwiches and washed down his square of cake with hot coffee; then he waited impatiently in the tiny little tool room for the young mechanic, Joe Smith, to come and explain the Scriptures to him. Presently he came.

There was some small talk at first, and Joe explained a little about how we got our Bible, about the apostles and prophets who had written it.

“It’s no ordinary book, Pete. It is set down in the Bible that ‘holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.’ You see, Pete, the Bible wasn’t just a product of the works of man. The wisdom of Heaven is in it, at our beck and call as we need it.”

Pete smiled assent to that.

“I’ll tell you, Joe, there’s something to that. Why, when my little girl began to talk Bible to me, I was in the very clutches of the devil himself. I was a wife beater, a drunkard, a regular sot, and a gambler. It was God—oh, there’s no doubt about it! It was God who set me free! But come on, Joe. Let’s read. That bell will ring any minute. I want to have you explain something over here in Daniel to me.”

Pete put on his glasses, and leafed worriedly for some seconds. At last his face cleared. “Here it is. Daniel 2. Do you know anything about that?”

Joe took the little Book.

“Oh, yes! Why, I’ve studied that in school. We even got the historical background for it, which makes it all the more interesting and helpful. You see, the children of Israel, or Jews, as we call them, had lived there in the Holy Land for hundreds of years. God had called Israel His chosen people and had given them a great many promises if they would keep their covenant with Him.”

“Why, that reads just like a story!” commented Pete interestedly.

“It is a true story, as interesting as any you ever read! Well, when Israel got into a kind of spiritual rut, they began to worship idols and to be just as bad as the nations around them. They broke their covenant time and time again. God sent His prophets to rebuke them and to warn them. At last He let a heathen king of Babylon conquer their country and carry them away into captivity. Daniel was one of the captives.”

“Now that’s just what I want!” exclaimed Pete. “It makes the Bible ever so much more interesting if you know a little background to the stories.”

“Well, as I was saying, Pete, this young man, Daniel, was with the captives that were carried away. He and three other Hebrew boys were so strong and handsome that King Nebuchadnezzar decided to put them into his royal school, where they could be trained to be wise men in his kingdom. See? This first chapter in Daniel is all about the tests that were put to them there. But the second chapter begins right where Daniel was really up against it. He had a real test put to him, young as he was. Listen, and I will read it to you.”

A look of supreme contentment overspread Pete’s features. He leaned back in the disreputable old chair and prepared to enjoy himself fully as the young man read.

“And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.

“Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.”

“You see, Pete, there at the head of the school which Daniel attended were men whom we would call fortunetellers.

“They claimed to be able to solve mysteries, reveal secrets, or foretell the future, just as palmists or clairvoyants do now.

They called themselves ‘wise men.’ They were these magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers. The magicians were a group of men who pretended to have wonderful things revealed to them by magic. Astrologers studied the stars, and made calendars of lucky days and unlucky days. People were always running to them to see if it was an auspicious time to do this or that or the other thing. They pretended to be able to calculate by the movements of the stars just what things were to happen in the future. Sorcerers were like the spiritualistic mediums of today. They claimed to get their superior knowledge of future events by talking with the dead.

“And the king swallowed all that?” queried Pete incredulously.

“Well, it was a superstitious age, and everyone was ready to believe all kinds of unnatural things.

But let's read on:

"And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.

"Then spoke the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.

"The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill.

"But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honor: therefore show me the dream, and the interpretation thereof."

"Now you see, the Lord really sent the king this dream so as to help him to learn who is really the true God. He was a heathen king, and worshiped idols. He thought the God of the Hebrews didn't amount to much, or his nation would not have been able to conquer them.

"When the king woke up, he knew he had dreamed something striking, but he couldn't remember what it was, try as he might. It bothered him so that he couldn't sleep. He fully expected the wise men to do as they claimed they could do. When they began to squirm and 'crawfish,' he was terribly angry. I believe King Nebuchadnezzar saw through their lies and pretenses. Anyhow, that was when he told them that he would kill them all if they didn't tell him the dream."

At this juncture a loud, buzzing noise rang out sharply in the distance.

"Well, it's work again, Pete. See you tomorrow night."

"Joe, I don't know how to thank you. Why don't you come down here and eat your lunch? We could talk while we're eating, and not waste any time. "That's an idea," responded Joe. "I'll do it."

The next evening Joe brought a book with pictures in it to explain the chapter further. He brought it up enthusiastically, wrapped in a newspaper, so that it wouldn't get dirty. Pete turned it over and looked at the title, Daniel and the Revelation.

"Where did we get to last night, Pete?" Joe asked, fingering the pages for the picture.

"Oh, you got to where they were going to kill those men for not knowing the dream."

"Oh, yes! Well, as I was saying, the king saw that they had just been fooling him all along; so he commanded that they all be killed. Of course, the news came to Daniel, and he said, 'Why is the decree from the king so hasty?' And right away he went in and told the king that if he would give him time, he'd show him what his dream was. The Lord showed Daniel that dream in a night vision. Here's a picture of what the king saw in his dream."

He showed Pete the picture of a great image. The head was of gold, the chest was of silver, the thighs were of brass, and the legs were of iron and the feet of iron mixed with clay.

"Then Daniel told the king that Babylon, his kingdom, was the head of gold; that another kingdom should arise after it inferior to it. Babylon would really be succeeded by three other kingdoms, until the ten kingdoms represented by the mixture of iron and clay should arise. The prophet said that they wouldn't mix or cleave to one another. The last thing that the king dreamed was that he saw a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which hit this image on the feet and broke it down. That great stone is the setting up of God's kingdom, or, as we say it, the coming of the Lord."

"What on earth did it all mean, Joe? Was it something that did happen or had happened or was to happen?"

"Well, you see, that was a prophecy that took in the history of the world. The head, shoulders, thighs, and legs represent the four great kingdoms that have ruled the world. We know that Babylon was first, because Daniel said to the king, 'Thou art this head of gold.'"

"Babylon began in 606 B.C. and continued until it was overthrown by Medo-Persia in the year 538 BC. That kingdom lasted until 331 B.C., when Alexander the Great, of Greece, conquered the world. Rome conquered Greece just 168 years before Christ.

"Rome was ruling the world when Christ was born. Don't you remember that Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be taxed by Caesar Augustus? Even Christ's tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers."

"Why, that's so!" Pete was absorbing the whole story with eager, hungry interest.

"Rome was broken up between the years AD 351 and 475, by ten barbarian tribes, who formed ten smaller kingdoms. These kingdoms were the beginning of our great European nations of today. But I'd better hurry with this story, Pete. Look at that clock! The bell will ring any minute now. ."

"The Book says, 'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed!' That refers to the great rock that shall smite the image on the feet, Pete! That's going

to happen soon now. Maybe in your day and mine!”

Bzzz! Brrrr-ing! The sharp staccato of the bell harshly interrupted their conversation. “Good night, Joe. Come again, please.”

“Of course, I’ll come, Pete. Next time I’ll tell you about the coming of the Lord.”

Pete carried his Bible to and fro every day. He was more interested in the unrolling revelations of the Holy Scriptures than he had ever been in anything before. How he could have wasted his substance for liquor and cards was a source of constant wonderment now. He wasn’t a Christian yet. But he was fast undergoing the change from death unto life. He hardly knew how to pray. Yet he did pray. His words came awkwardly, but the Father who knows all pieced out the places where his prayer was lacking, and blessed him abundantly.

Everyone at the Johnson home was happier, more lighthearted. Even the house took on a kind of festive air. Pete spent a little time every day doing this or that to make it more attractive or to make life more comfortable for his dear ones. He even got the landlord to furnish the paint, and he painted the house a neat brown and trimmed it in white. He took Dicky’s little wagon over to the dump and loaded it full of flagstones that someone had thrown away. The boys helped him to lay them artistically around the house and out to the gate.

That got everyone interested in the yard. Martha Ellen made a flower bed, and Verna raked the yard clean from house to fence. She and the boys burned the trash out in the field. Little John brought branches and leaves and papers, and kept flinging them with outrageous aim upon the flickering fire. They all took turns at the clacking, protesting old lawn mower. Pete kept having them stop every little bit, so that he could oil it, but it kept on murdering the atmosphere with its harsh, metallic racket.

The whole house had gradually undergone a change. The sleazy old thin ropes of curtains had given way to neat lace panels hung in pairs before the shining clean glass of the windows.

It didn’t come all at once. It was a gradual change. New sheets were made capably out of heavy muslin. New pillowcases appeared with some of Verna’s crocheted lace whipped neatly on them. There were new window shades. Things were indeed “looking up” for the Johnsons.

Then mother started in, one room at a time, to make the whole place livable and dear. She took the bedsteads out into the yard and enameled them, while Pete painted their bedroom floor a soft, clean brown.

When she cleaned the living room, Pete brought home some creamy enamel and some walnut varnish. He enameled the woodwork, and the next day Martha Ellen varnished the floors.

5. WHITER THAN SNOW

THE MIDNIGHT hour was at hand. Pete was always eager to begin the nightly study of the Bible. He had mulled over the tales that Joe had told until Martha Ellen laughed at him.

“Who is this Joe person you are always talking about?” she demanded of him, laughingly. I believe he must be a walking history book. But those stories you tell me are surely interesting.”

Life had taken on added color for the night watchman. He was learning to find the greatest joy in reading and studying the Word of God. When Joe appeared, Pete was waiting for him. He had his Bible ready and also a little notebook in which to keep notes.

“Well, it’s the study on Christ’s second coming tonight, isn’t it? Let’s turn to Matthew 24,” Joe began; and he grasped the Bible and turned to the place easily. Then, before he began to read, he explained the setting of the story.

“It was the last week of Jesus’ life, Pete. He had tried and tried to make His disciples see that He had come to die. But they were stubborn and would not believe it. They wanted to think that He had come to be a king. They went with Him over to the Mount of Olives on this particular day. Only Jesus and His disciples were there. From the place where they sat, they could see the Holy City spread out before them. The Temple, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, dominated the foreground. The disciples, like all Jews, were very proud of it. To their utter astonishment, Jesus uttered a mournful prophecy. They could hardly believe it.

“Verily I say unto you,’ He said, sadly, ‘There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’”

“The Temple isn’t standing today, is it?” queried Pete.

“Oh, no!” Joe put in quickly. “Only thirty-seven years after Jesus uttered this prophecy the Romans destroyed it. That was a dreadful time, Pete. Thousands and thousands of Jews died of starvation in

the siege that the Roman general brought against the city. In their terrible hunger, some even killed and ate their own children.

“The Romans burned the fine Temple, and they cast down the stones and even ran a plow across the land where it had stood. You can read it all in history.”

“I wonder if some of those people who heard Jesus say that the Temple would be destroyed were still living. If they were there, they would surely remember,” mused the night watchman, engrossed in the subject.

“I shouldn’t wonder. Later on in the chapter we read, ‘Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.’ Dr. Adam Clarke, a noted Bible commentator, says that there were so many false messiahs who arose after the fall of Jerusalem that the Romans killed some almost every day. Even today we hear of false christs—men who claim they are God or Jesus.”

Pete began reading ahead in his eagerness to catch more of the truth that suddenly seemed so clear to him.

“Why, look here!” he exclaimed, pointing to the sixth verse.—Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.’ Why! If ever the world was full of wars and troubles, it is now! Is that really a sign of the end of the world, Joe?”

Pete leaned back and looked at his friend with wide, unbelieving eyes. The little room seemed to be all a-tremble with his emotion.

“Why, Joe!” he breathed. “We must be nearing the end of all things!”

“Yes, but just wait, man! You haven’t read half of the signs yet! Read on!”

Pete read—read with an alert mind, with eager interest, a whole maze of terrible, convincing words. Words common in every newspaper he picked up: Famines. Pestilences. Earthquakes. False prophets.

Pete read to himself, his lips moving. The room was still, save for the slight brushing whisper of Pete’s words, soft and breathy, like a maple leaf raking against a shingle roof. Every little while, he would stop and throw an amazed comment at his friend as if he had discovered something new and infinitely precious to him.

“See here, Joe! This verse says that the stars would fall! My own grandmother saw that. Why, I heard her tell of it many a time when I was just a little boy. She said that everyone was frightened nearly to death, and thought that the world was really coming to an end then and there!”

Joe smiled calmly. There was a look of quiet peace in his eyes, and Pete was quick to note it. “That was a sign of the end, too, Pete,” he said.

But Pete was not so easily calmed by the mere statement of facts.

“Why, man!” he ejaculated excitedly, wiping the sweat from his forehead. “I’m not ready for the Lord to come. I’ve lived a terribly wicked life. The good Lord must forgive me! How can I get ready?”

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved,” quoted Joe. “There’s really not a great deal to it. It’s just accepting Christ as your personal Savior. Then He will come into your life and will lead you into all truth.”

Tears were raining down Pete’s weather-beaten cheeks. His voice trembled.

“Joe, will He show me what to do to clean up my life? I don’t seem to know. I want to be good and to live right. Do you suppose He cares enough for me to show me the way? I’m pretty worthless. I’ve lived a godless life and have blasphemed His blessed name thousands of times. How He can forgive that, I don’t know.”

“We have only to ask,” Joe replied simply. “Let us kneel.” The prayers that ascended from that littered little watchman’s office were as sweet incense to the Father. And true to the promise so long held out to the sin-ridden sons of men, Pete was that night purged of his sins and washed in the blood of the Lamb.

The first prayer that ascended was from the lips of one who had long trusted. The words came easily, and they were well chosen from long practice. The other prayer was incoherent, stumbling, breathy, and punctuated by rending sobs. The words were jumbled and ill chosen. But the Father in heaven pieced out with His love and with Pete’s motive the words he lacked. And, lo, when the prayer came up before God—it was as fair as the morning and as bright as the day.

The two were just rising from their knees when the bell sounded through the building, calling all hands back to their work.

When Pete was alone once more, he felt happier than he had ever felt before in his life. As he made his rounds of the big rooms every hour, he seemed to be treading on air. It couldn’t be possible that

he was “washed clean.” That he was “whiter than the snow.”

6. MARTHA ELLEN RESISTS

SEVERAL WEEKS later, Pete came home as gleeful as a little boy, with the news that Joe had consented to come home and have supper with them.

“We’ll have an early supper, and then he will give us a study. There’s no work tonight; boiler number 6 is broken down, and the repair crew will be working on it all night. The boss told me to take the night off. He’s going to be there, and he’ll keep a watch on things for me.”

Martha Ellen instantly became the responsible hostess. “Why, that’s fine, Pete. I’ll be glad to see your friend and hear him talk. I’ll get a good supper, too. And I’ll use my new china.”

The house was cleaned and everything was in readiness for their guest. Since Martha Ellen had “something to do with,” she took a great deal of pride in her little home, and made it as cute as a doll’s bungalow.

When the curtains were straightened and the shades were drawn to just the right level, and the furniture was polished, Martha Ellen turned her attention to the food.

Supper was piping hot when Joe arrived. Martha Ellen was instantly attracted by the frank, open countenance of the young man. He just looked good. Verna took his straw hat in and laid it on the bed. Then mother showed them to their places at the table. At Pete’s request, Joe bowed his head and asked the blessing on the food.

After the good things had disappeared, they all got up from the table and went into the pleasant little living room. Verna picked up the dishes and stacked them neatly on the kitchen table. Mother had told her not to wash them, but to hurry and come in, so that she could hear the Bible study.

The young man took the Bible and sat over near the lamp.

“Have you folks ever considered the Bible form of baptism?” he asked. “We are going to study another subject tonight, but I just wondered if you had ever given any thought to it.”

Pete considered for a moment.

“There are three forms so far as I can figure out,” he said. “Pouring, sprinkling, and immersion. I always favored immersion myself, though I can’t give any special reason why.”

“I was sprinkled last summer,” offered Verna, timidly. She had come in and sat down in a low chair by the table. The little boys were washing up for bed. Verna had gone into their little bedroom and laid out their night clothes and turned down their beds.

“When Jesus was here on earth, He was baptized by John the Baptist,” Joe began. “He wasn’t sprinkled or poured upon, but was immersed in the water of the Jordan River. Baptism means nothing unless it is done right. If it is done according to the way our Savior was baptized, it means death to sin, burial, and a resurrection in which we will arise to walk in newness of life. No other form of baptism could mean that.”

There was real tragedy in Verna’s eyes at this thought. She leaned forward and touched her father’s hand timidly. “Why, Father,” she said, sorrow in her voice. “Why, Father, I’ve never really been baptized, then! What shall I do?”

“You were sprinkled, my dear?” queried Joe.

“Yes,” she answered sadly. “I didn’t know. I thought I was baptized. I didn’t understand then.”

“That won’t be hard to remedy, my girl. If you really love the Lord, and want to serve Him, you can be baptized the right way the next time.”

Verna’s shining big, earnest eyes were as eloquent an answer as Joe needed. He was truly amazed at finding this family so eagerly seeking truth. The mother didn’t seem so—well, so eager—as Pete. But she was kindly disposed and seemed to be a good woman. Aloud he said:

“Well, since we have that settled, let’s get down to the evening study. You see, you folks are going to find out that there are things which this Good Book teaches or forbids that the world in general pays no attention to whatever. Very few people really believe and obey all the Bible. People think that those who do so are queer, or peculiar. I am one of those queer ones who believe that the whole Word of God is inspired. I try to do all that He has asked me to do.”

“I believe,” answered Pete, “that a person ought to do just that if he expects to be a Christian. Now that I am on the right road, I aim to stay there. I was heading for hell and making life miserable for my family. I aim to be a real Christian from now on.”

“God will indeed help you, my friend. There is never a day or an hour that He does not watch over

His precious children. The Bible says that not a sparrow falls, but the heavenly Father notices it. Now, let's begin our study."

Joe opened a little black-leather notebook and laid it on the table by the lamp. Leafing through it for a moment, he at last found his place.

Then raising his eyes suddenly, he faced Pete. "What day did the Jews keep as their rest day, Pete?" he questioned suddenly.

"Why, Saturday, I guess. Orthodox Jews still keep it, I think," stammered the man, not very sure of himself.

"What day did Jesus keep?" Joe addressed himself to Martha Ellen.

She sat there in the big leather chair that Pete had bought for her several weeks before. The room looked very pretty. Martha Ellen had hung her picture called "The Gleaners" over the davenport. A cream-colored fluted shade was over the lamp.

Martha Ellen colored slightly at the question Joe shot at her.

"Why—why, I suppose He kept the Jewish Sabbath," she answered slowly. "Why, I'm sure He did," she answered briskly, sure of herself now. "He was a Jew."

"You're both right," answered Joe. "Now, another question. Why do people all over the Christian world now keep Sunday?"

Martha Ellen's face broke into a proud smile. "That's easy!" she laughed. "It's to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord! Everyone knows that!"

Joe took a tiny book from his pocket. "I'm going to read to you," he said, "from a Catholic doctrinal catechism." He leafed through it rapidly. "Here it is," he breathed. "Page 174:

"Question. Have you any other way of proving that the church has power to institute festivals of precept?

"Answer. Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her, —she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday, the seventh day, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority."

Pete's face was an exclamation point. His eyes burned with the inward fires of enthusiasm. His mouth hung open in astonishment. The clock over in the corner made the only sound heard in the room. Joe reached for his Bible.

"Now, I am going to show you good folks where this very thing was foretold in the Bible. Turn to Daniel 7.

"You remember, Pete, the dream of the great image that we studied a few evenings ago? Well, Daniel had another dream about four beasts, which goes into more detail about the four kingdoms. Though he had the dream years and years before some of these kingdoms were in existence, he saw all about what they would do.

"The first thing Daniel saw in his dream was a creature like a lion. Read it, right there, Mrs. Johnson."

Martha Ellen read the passage Joe pointed out.

"The lion is the king of beasts, just as gold is the king of metals. This animal's wings indicate the fact that the kingdom it represented, Babylon, conquered the world very quickly—even as an eagle flies.

"The next kingdom, Medo-Persia, was represented by a bear. It raised itself up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth. The three ribs must have been Lydia, Egypt, and Babylon; for the Persians were very cruel to those three countries especially.

"The third country, Grecia, was a leopard with four wings and four heads. That was a pretty good way of describing Alexander the Great, who was the king of Greece. He was quick, powerful, sly, and treacherous, just like a leopard. He put the utmost faith in his four generals. I believe I can even remember their names. They were such queer names that they stuck in my mind. We had to memorize them in school when I took ancient history. They were: Ptolemy, Cassander, Seleucus, and Lysimachus. History records that Alexander the Great conquered the world so swiftly that his soldiers actually covered 5,600 miles of ground in eight years. They traveled from Greece to India and back to the city of Babylon, conquering as they went.

"The last beast is the one about which I want to tell you. It was so dreadful that Daniel couldn't even think of a name for it. He said it was 'dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth' (see here in the seventh and eighth verses), 'and it had ten horns.' (Remember the ten toes in the image, Pete?) Now, read on. 'I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn

were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.’

“Now, later in the chapter, the vision is explained. Verses 20 and 21 tell about the ‘little horn.’ ‘I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them.’ In verses 24 and 25 we read more about the same horn: ‘And another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws.’”

“There now, folks, that is the prophecy! This little horn grew out of the great and terrible beast that represented Rome. It is the papal power of Rome. It is the only religious organization on earth that claims to have a right to change God’s time and God’s law.”

Pete sat still for a long moment, pondering the truths that had been presented to him for the first time. Martha Ellen was silent, too. These new truths and scriptural revelations were too deep for much talk.

“You say the Roman church changed the day, and not the Lord Jesus? Why, I always heard—oh, I’m sure you must be mistaken, Joe! Surely, surely all the churches wouldn’t keep Sunday if it were just a Catholic day! How did it ever get started? I can’t picture such a thing.”

“Well, I’m not mistaken, Pete! Smarter men than you and I have hunted for a text to prove that the day was changed by Christ, and never found it. Catholics say, ‘It was the holy Catholic Church that changed the day of rest from Saturday to Sunday, the first day of the week.’ The Bible says, ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,’ but the Catholic Church says, ‘No, keep the first day of the week,’ and the whole world bows in obedience.

“Now, I really must go, folks. It is very late. Thank you for your kind hospitality. I surely did enjoy that delicious supper, Mrs. Johnson.”

Pete, Martha Ellen, and Verna went with him to the door. The little boys had been in bed for a long time.

Pete and Martha Ellen, standing there, felt a surge of admiration for him. That he should take the time and trouble to help them was a source of great wonderment to them. It was inexplicable. They couldn’t understand it. Why, he must be more than ordinary. Why—why—then the truth of the thing flashed on Pete. That was what a Christian was, anyway. Something different. That was what he, Pete, would be. A Christian. A Christian like Joe.

Then they turned and went into the house. Martha Ellen and Verna hastened into the kitchen to wash the dishes. Pete came in and got a tea towel and helped dry the dishes.

It was that night that Martha Ellen said something that pierced Pete’s heart like a sword. She was rubbing the plates meditatively when she looked up and spoke.

“That all sounds good enough to hear him tell it, but it strikes me that he’s making a mountain out of a molehill. I believe that if we live a good life and try to do right, the Lord will bless us. No use being a radical and going crazy over religion. I’d feel like a fool going to church on Saturday.”

“I haven’t looked into it all I plan to, wife. I’m going to dig down to the bottom of this thing. There’s something queer about it—you know, Christ’s keeping one day and our keeping another. I’m going to find out for myself. Then if it’s right, I’m willing to do it. I’m willing to go all the way for Jesus.”

But Martha Ellen was out of sorts. Perhaps it was because she was resisting the sweet insistence of the precious Holy Spirit. Down in her heart she felt a striving. She could not deny the truths she had heard; but old customs, old beliefs, clamored for their established position in her life. She rebelled at a change.

“Pete”—she turned to her husband with more than a small trace of asperity—“if you get tangled up with a bunch of narrow-minded fanatics, you’ll be no better off than you were before you stopped drinking liquor. You’re just as bad off at one extreme as at another. Why don’t you let well enough alone? I knew all our pleasant times were just too good to last!”

Then, banging the empty dishpan down on the stove, she flounced out of the room.

7. ALL THE WAY TOGETHER

JOE LENT Pete a book named *The Great Controversy*, and he carried it around with him everywhere. The more he read, the more he was convinced that Joe was right about the Sabbath. This was the first truth that he had recognized from God’s Word that he hadn’t accepted instantly. But this—well, it was difficult to believe and embrace. It upset all the traditions and ideas of religion that Pete had ever held or known of. He had a hard time adjusting himself to the idea that Saturday, not Sunday, is the Sabbath of the Lord. Then every little while he read some excerpt from *The Great Controversy* that would pierce his

very soul. For example:

“Vast councils were held from time to time, in which the dignitaries of the church were convened from all the world. In nearly every council the Sabbath which God had instituted was pressed down a little lower, while the Sunday was correspondingly exalted.”

“The law of God, being a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, must forever endure, ‘as a faithful witness in heaven.’ Not one command has been annulled; not a jot or tittle has been changed.”

“The claim so often put forth, that Christ changed the Sabbath, is disproved by His own words. In His Sermon on the Mount He said: ‘Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.’”

Pete could not get away from the knowledge that here was truth—truth and light for which he had prayed so earnestly, and he had not accepted it. Martha Ellen’s attitude made it harder, too. Poor little woman! He had made life so unpleasant for her that it was hard to cross her in this. She had been so patient in difficulty, so gentle in trials. But she acted really cranky about the Sabbath. Down in his heart Pete knew that if he came to the definite knowledge that he should keep the Sabbath, he would surely keep it. Martha Ellen must somehow become reconciled to it. She would in time.

How could he help her to accept the Sabbath? Subtly he laid his plans. Sometimes he would read her a quotation that had stirred his heart. He would watch her face narrowly the while. Her lips would tighten, and he could almost see her eyes harden. Oh! How could he disarm her?

About the middle of the week, Verna came running in from the street.

“Mother! Mother!” she called. “Father’s friend, that Mr. Joe, has just been here, and he says that the shop will be closed down for two days because the superintendent’s boy got killed.”

“Oh! Isn’t that awful!” Martha Ellen cried. “Was he a young man or a child, Verna? Did you hear how it happened?”

Verna was bubbling over with the knowledge she was bearing. “Mr. Joe says he was down in Crutsinger’s. You know they sell liquor there. There was some gunplay, and he got killed in a fight. He says to tell father when he gets up.”

Pete made a tut-tutting sound in his throat when he heard it. He himself had known much of those barroom brawls. He had even engaged in them. Oh! Pete thought, he had truly passed from death unto life.

Two nights later when the shop was started again, Joe and Pete talked over the terrible tragedy. A young man accustomed to luxury, and showered with every advantage, had fallen into dissipation and evil ways. The drinking of liquor awakened a tiger that slept in his blood. He could not resist it. And once the habit held him in its clutches, he, usually a pleasant and mild-mannered young man, became a veritable demon. Surly and insulting, he aroused the tiger in other men who were the worse for strong drink. In the affray men were injured by his wild shots. Even an innocent passer-by was hit by a bullet, and was now unconscious in the hospital.

Now, the dissipated young man was sleeping his last long sleep in a great marble vault in the cemetery. Even in death he had the best that money could buy.

“Yes,” commented Pete. “He may have the best of things in death, but what then? I suppose the poor fellow is scorching in hell right now. That’s an awful thing to think about, Joe.”

But Joe had not seconded Pete’s comment. He turned and bent a long look on Pete. And Pete read in that glance that he was wrong.

“What’s the matter, Joe? Don’t you believe in hell either? One of these days, I’m going to find out that people don’t believe a single thing the Bible really teaches. Doesn’t the Bible teach about hell?”

Out came the Bible again. Joe even carried one in his work clothes.

“My Bible teaches that ‘the dead know not any thing,’ he answered. Turning to Ecclesiastes 9:5, he read: ‘The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.’”

“Let me take that text down. I want to show it to Martha Ellen.” Pete got out his notebook and pencil, and took down the text. “She said the other night that it surely seems queer, the things you find in the Bible. Says it’s funny that other people haven’t found them, too. But I believe them, Joe. I don’t feel that way about it.”

“Take down this one, too.” Joe was turning rapidly in his Bible. “Here it tells how long the dead will sleep. Job 14:12: ‘So man lies down, and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.’ First Thessalonians 4:16 tells which of the dead will rise first. ‘The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of

God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.’ There are more texts on the state of the dead, Pete. I’ll show them to you when we have more time.”

Pete had copied down all the texts, and now he put his notebook into his pocket.

“You know, Joe, every day that goes by I am more and more convinced that the Lord sent you to me. You came just at the time when I needed you most. It puts me in mind of a song my mother used to sing when I was a little boy, ‘Just when I need Him, Jesus is near.’ I am more and more sure every time I think of my awful past that the Lord snatched me as a brand from the burning. But one thing I do want to know is, why were we taught that people go straight to heaven or to hell at death?”

Joe laughed easily. “That’s a common doctrine that is taught by many religious denominations, but it has no foundation in the Bible. The Lord will certainly burn the earth and all evil works—even the wicked and the devil and his angels—but that will not be until the end of time.”

“Where in the world did you learn so much about the Bible?”

“Well, Pete, I went to a religious school where the Bible is taught every day by men and women who believe that the whole Bible is true. I had hoped to be a minister, but my father became ill and I had to come home and help support my parents. Someday I hope to go back and finish. I want to have a part in spreading the gospel.”

Then the bell rang, and the two men went about their work, Pete jangling his keys along dark corridors and flashing his light into dark corners; Joe back to the machine shop to work, and to wait upon the Lord. Little did he realize that the Savior had maneuvered his affairs just as He did so that Pete could hear the good news of salvation. And it was only a matter of weeks later that Joe’s father amazingly recovered his health, and the young man went back to his precious college work again.

Pete was so definitely under conviction the following Friday evening that he could hardly bear to get into his work clothes. When he picked up his dinner pail and walked out down the path toward the gate, he looked back over his shoulder and gazed long at the waning sun. It was a huge orange ball poised above a sea of purple clouds. Pete could hardly bear to see that sun go down. Joe had explained that the Lord had directed away back in the beginning of time that men should keep the Sabbath from evening until evening. It began and ended at sunset. The Sabbath was drawing near. And Pete was on his way to work.

All that Friday night, Pete went about his work soberly. There had been something of a sob in his breath even at the beginning when he had come within sight of the great brick building and looked back at the sun as he went in. It was like a big orange-colored plate slipping behind the green fringe that lined the horizon. Pete stood for an instant and watched it. Perceptibly he saw it move. Finally it slipped down, and buried itself in a fluff of sudsy clouds. Then, soberly, Pete went in, took out his card from the rack, and punched the time clock. The Sabbath had begun, the Sabbath of the Lord, and he, Pete, was not keeping it.

Ever since he had turned himself right about-face and changed his way of living, it had been hard for him to see precious new light and not embrace it.

Even Martha Ellen had been a little sober about it that day. Oh, she might be flippant and speak lightly of it, but Pete knew that it had cut her to the heart. Another thing that pleased him was that Joe had brought them three books to read. Making Home Happy, Making Home Peaceful, and Those Bible Readings. Martha Ellen had made a practice of reading them aloud to the children at night, so Pete missed that; but when he went to bed in the morning, he took one of the books with him and read himself to sleep. He had managed to keep up with them in their reading in that way. When he read of Sim Blake and his drunkard father, his pillow was wet with tears. When he laid the book away, he got out on his knees and thanked God for seeking him out and establishing him on the Rock.

But now they had got through both of the first books and were reading Those Bible Readings. Pete could hardly stand that, the truth was so plain; and he knew that his wife was affected by it. She didn’t seem the same. She could hardly speak of religion without tears in her voice. Pete wanted to pray for her. He wanted to pray as he went about his work, but somehow, tonight he couldn’t pray.

With a feeling of foreboding, he saw the velvet curtains of night drawn down and pinned with stars. When he leaned out of the window to get a breath of fresh air, he could hear the little night creatures sawing away on their fiddles, in the symphony of the night. Pete felt frightened because he couldn’t pray. He had that mental discomfort of someone who cannot recollect a dream, or who knows he has forgotten something and cannot remember what it is.

Tonight, as he carried his jangling keys through old, gloomy corridors, past sinister-shadowed parallelogram doorways, his shadow ran before him like a monstrous spider.

The darkness seemed peopled with creatures from the bottomless pit, who were reaching out to claw him back into the dreadful maw. Pete’s nerves were jumpy. Never had a man’s conscience chastised

him so mercilessly.

Then when he got back from the rounds, he couldn't bring himself to read his Bible. It would be a travesty on the worship of the good God to do that. Then, to his horror, he began to long for his pipe. How good and soothing a pipe full of tobacco would be to his jumpy nerves. How cooling a draft of beer would be to his parched throat. It seemed as if the fires of hell began to burn within him, begging to be quenched by the dark beverage of hell. If he hadn't known just what it was, he would have hastened across the way at midnight and had a smoke and a drink. He had often done that before. But Pete knew of a certainty that if he ever went back, he could never return; that it was a last supreme effort of the arch deceiver to wrench him away from his new allegiance.

Then, too, at midnight he missed Joe. He ate his sandwiches as if he were in some kind of daze. True, he had noted before that Joe was never there on Friday nights, but he hadn't thought much of that. The machine shop never worked on Friday night unless they had some kind of special rush job. Even then Joe was never there. Now Pete knew why. Joe was keeping the Sabbath. And he, Pete, was trampling upon it. The thought was horrible to the man.

He began his work again after midnight. He made his way down the gloomy halls with his keys, to go the complete rounds, to check up on locked doors, on piles of waste, on storerooms. He went as slowly as he could, for he could hardly bear the troublesome idea of being alone with himself and his tormenting thoughts in that glaring little whitewashed office.

Down at the end of the main corridor was the main tool room where the mechanics stored tools worth hundreds of dollars. Pete was supposed to check that room every time he passed it. Tonight he reached out to shake the knob and try it just as he had always done. His flashlight was out he knew the way in the dark—and he groped fumblingly for the knob. But the door was open! The whirl of the machinery had drowned out the sound of his footsteps. Looking in, Pete saw a bulk before a cabinet. A bead of light was playing over a box of expensive drills.

Pete must do something. If he went to spread the alarm, the burglar might get away. But could his voice, raised in alarm, be heard above the drone of machinery? Pete parleyed with the thought for an instant, but decided to try it.

"Help! Robbers!" he bellowed in a voice that seemed calculated to wake the dead. He turned on his flashlight and got a glimpse of the man's face. He recognized him instantly as a man who had been discharged from the machine shop but a week before on a charge of pilfering.

The thief's face registered varied emotions as he turned to flee—first fright, then chagrin, then crafty determination. Hate narrowed his eyes to slits. There was a swift movement toward his belt, and then his leveled automatic pistol belched fire. But Pete was too quick for him, and he dodged the shot. Possibly his good angel was there to help him. The sound of the explosion ricocheted through the halls in a series of sharp echoes. Before the man could fire again, Pete was upon him and had wrenched the weapon from his hand. Then, because he was a strong man, Pete grasped the thief by the shoulder and marched him down to the office, and turned him over to the proper authorities.

The night boss leaped to his feet, appreciative of the work that his employee had done. And because daylight was streaking the east, he told Pete to go on home; that he had had enough excitement for one night.

But Pete had to have his say first.

"Boss," he said, in a low, embarrassed voice, "I'm not going to work any more on Friday nights. I am going to join the same church Joe Smith belongs to. Will I lose my job?" But the boss was kindness itself to him.

"Not after what you have done for us this night, Pete!" He got up and patted Pete on the shoulder reassuringly. "Not after tonight! I know just the fellow who will take your place on Friday night. He works in the machine shop and would like a little extra money. His wife has been in the hospital, and I guess he needs it, poor fellow. But this won't affect your wages either, Pete. The Amberton Manufacturing Company can afford to pay a little more to a man who would face death to protect his company's interests."

Martha Ellen was just laying the fire in the range when he came in, and he had to go right in and sit down and tell her all about his night's adventure.

"And, Martha Ellen—he looked up at her almost timidly—"suppose I had been killed last night; suppose I had been snuffed out when I was doing a thing I knew I shouldn't do. Why, wife, I turned sick at the thought of it. It was only the mercy of the blessed Lord that saved me. I promised Him then and there that I'd keep the next Sabbath."

Martha Ellen had the fire roaring, but she was listening carefully. Pete could hardly tell what the

expression on her face could mean. He watched her worriedly.

I asked the boss for Friday night off. He gave it to me, Martha Ellen. I don't get a cut in salary either. God is good, wife. I'm going to go to church today."

Pete paused a minute, and then, clearing his throat embarrassedly, he began again. He was clasping and unclasping his hands nervously. Martha Ellen felt her heart plunge in pity at the next words.

"I wish you'd go with me, too, wife. I don't know of anything I'd like better. It'd be almost heavenly to have my whole family begin with me to keep all the commandments of God."

His voice was very low, and he was paring at a big thumbnail nervously. When he looked up, he saw that her face was bathed with tears. She could not speak for a time—and then, when she did, her voice trembled till she could hardly control it.

"Of course, Pete!" she sobbed. "Why, I couldn't do anything else either; I've been so miserable this whole week long!"

Then Pete rose quickly and took his wife in his arms. Their tears mingled, and they did not speak for a while. They didn't need to speak. A sweet new understanding had sprung up between them that was the harbinger of blessed and beautiful days to come.

And then they murmured on, those two, for they were in love—making wonderful plans for their children and for their own future. Every glance, every word was a caress. Then, when they saw that they must hasten and get the morning work done so that they would be on time for church, they knelt down by the old wooden kitchen chair and prayed. They prayed to the greatest Lover of all, who has healing in His wings, and then they rose with tear-drenched faces to begin a newer, a better, a bigger, and a broader life.

8. BUILDING FOR GOD

THAT SABBATH was a most glorious day. They got the children up a little earlier than usual, and Pete washed the boys and helped them get ready, while Verna and Martha Ellen got the breakfast. Everything was so pleasant and so harmonious that the horrors of the night before seemed dim and far away.

It was a good walk to the Seventh-day Adventist church. Joe had written the address for them on a piece of paper. They started early so that they would be on time. The little boys went ahead, marching importantly like little soldiers. Verna walked with her mother and father. The trees were a deep, rich green, and the sky was very blue. The air was perfumed with flowers. And through this air of peace and sanctity, Pete and Martha Ellen walked to church for the first time. There was something so solemn about this step that they were taking that they could not find words to express it. They just walked along and enjoyed the deep and ineffable pleasure of obeying God.

They entered the little church together. Joe saw them immediately, and hurried to meet them. He took Verna and the boys down to the children's section, but Pete and Martha Ellen he took to his own section.

The songs, the order of service, and the lesson study were marvelous to the two of them. They sat silent, drinking in every word, taking in every action. The sermon was on sin. Pete got out his little notebook and took down all the texts. Even the little boys listened to every word. They were clutching in eager hands copies of *Our Little Friend* that had been given them. Verna had a larger paper called *The Youth's Instructor*. Martha Ellen secretly determined to read them aloud to the children in the afternoon. That would be a good way to spend the Sabbath.

Then when they went home, Pete was overjoyed to learn that Martha Ellen had prepared the food the day before.

I just thought I could do on Friday what I used to do on Saturday," she explained. "According to those books, Adventists are stricter than most people. They don't bake or boil anything on the Sabbath. They just warm up what they cooked the day before. That's what I gather, anyway."

Verna set the table, and Martha Ellen put her pan of baked beans in the oven to warm. Then she peeled the jackets from the boiled potatoes, and sliced them into a skillet to brown. There were pies and a big three-layer chocolate cake. Everyone ate appreciatively and seemed to take an inordinate pleasure in the new order of things. Now it was a novelty. Later it grew to be a sweet and beautiful custom.

But the very next month there was a surprise for them. They had kept only three Sabbaths when a representative of the electric company for which Pete had once worked came to call on them.

It seemed that there was a vacancy, and Pete could have his old job back as high-tension lineman. The salary was nearly twice the amount he earned as night watchman. It was “day work,” too, ever so much more pleasant than working at night.

He gave notice to the factory where he was watchman, and they let him go, regretfully. He had been such a good worker that they hated to lose him. Then he went back to the old job with a real thrill of pleasure. It was his job, and he loved it. There was something about it that he could take pride in. And then the extra money! That was no small item.

He had begun to pay a tithe on his income, too. Little buff envelopes were given out at the church, in which were put the tithes and offerings. Pete always made out his envelope on Friday afternoon when he got home. It was a wonderful thing to put those bills down in the envelope and to know that they would go to help send the blessed gospel to other folks who were hungering as he had.

Perhaps that giving of money to missions was what caused Pete and Martha Ellen to become so concerned about the lost ones. Then one day after they had been going to church for some months, a preacher came to their little church who told them about “unentered counties.” There were counties right around their own river country in which there was not a single Seventh-day Adventist. That cut Pete and Martha Ellen to the heart. People were in desperate need right at their very door.

To Pete, to see a need was to act. Martha Ellen was his worthy second, and they moved, bag and baggage, into the nearest unentered county. Pete bought a new automobile, so that he could get to work every day. In his enthusiasm, he named the shining new car “The Old Gospel Chariot,” because he had bought it to light the gospel lamp in one of Indiana’s unentered counties.

The house they rented was large and roomy, and was on one of the main streets of the sleepy little village of Carters Ferry. Martha Ellen, armed with a scrub brush and a bucket and soap, and an abundance of cleaning rags, made the big house shine with cleanliness. It smelled like clean suds when she had finished.

The moving van came in the middle of the afternoon, and Martha Ellen superintended the placing of the furniture. She had the men set everything just where it was supposed to be. When they were through tramping back and forth with their great heavy loads, the house looked already half settled. The shades were up, and Verna knew that the curtains were clean and ironed smooth. It would be but a matter of minutes to run the rods into them. They would make the house look so much cozier.

It was then that Verna noticed the big front parlor. She rolled back the ponderous big oaken doors. There was the room, the floor clean, the woodwork polished, and the windows shining. There were two pairs of double windows in the front, while in one corner was a pretty circular alcove, with windows all around. There was a fireplace in another corner, with a blue-tile hearth and a broad mantel with a mirror over it. But there was not a stick of furniture in the room.

“Mother!” called Verna. “What is this room for? You don’t have a thing in it! I’d use it for a parlor.”

But Martha Ellen laughed with a little breathy chuckle, as one who hugs a secret. “You just wait, Verna. The furniture is coming for this room in the morning. You’ll like it—I know you will!”

Verna was mystified, but she did not have time to ponder long; there was straightening up to do. By the time father drove up the whole place was taking on the aspect of a real home. Savory odors were creeping out of the kitchen. Weary as she was, Martha Ellen prepared a tasty meal for her tired husband. She had grated a cabbage head and made slaw with sour cream and lemon juice. Then, mixing up a bowlful of creamy dough, she rolled out some biscuits and cut out a quantity of flat disks and put them into the oven to bake. With some baked potatoes and gravy, they made an appetizing meal. Verna ran and opened a can of peaches for dessert.

Pete leaned back and surveyed their new domain with quiet joy in his eyes. Then he took out his watch and looked at it a moment.

I have just twenty minutes to get down to that carpenter shop. He says that if I help them, we’ll get them all done and stained tonight. They will be ready tomorrow for you to varnish, you and Verna.”

“What are ‘they,’ Father?” asked Verna.

But Martha Ellen and Pete only exchanged amused glances.

“You just wait and see, sweetheart. You’ll like them as well as we do. You’ll get to help straighten up the front room in the morning.”

Then Pete was gone, and Verna and Martha Ellen cleaned up the kitchen. They were very tired, and as soon as the dishes were done, they washed up and went to bed.

It was about the middle of the morning when a van drew up, and four strong men began to unload

a fine walnut piano. Martha Ellen showed them where to place it. She gave Verna a soft rag saturated with furniture polish and told her to polish it. The girl did it thoroughly and with deep delight. She had hardly finished when men began carrying in neat wooden pews stained brown. Martha Ellen placed them facing the little alcove in the corner. Next the men brought in a neat little pulpit desk and placed it in the alcove. Then Martha Ellen began to unroll the soft runners. Quite suddenly the pretty room, with its warm tan wallpaper, assumed the beautiful, reverent atmosphere of a church. Unconsciously, Martha Ellen and Verna walked on tiptoe and lowered their voices.

And so the thing was begun. It wasn't two years until there were forty-five members, and a busy little church was located on one of the side streets of the village. Pete had built a cozy little building with his own hands. He had put his heart, his money, and his whole soul into spreading the good news of salvation. He went right down into the low dives of hell and wickedness and talked to the men with the earnestness of one who has been snatched as a brand from the burning. The liquor vendors grew to dread the squat little upright figure with flashing blue eyes, armed with the sword of the Spirit. He took away their best customers.

Then there came a day when Pete saw that he must move on. He moved to another county, rented a house and started in as before. Then he moved to another, and another, leaving churches and believers in the wake of his earnest lay evangelism.

And now—he has bricks for sale, Peter has.

He has built churches in towns in those unentered counties, and with his earnest labors, prayers, and Bible studies has brought more than seventy persons to a knowledge of the truth that he loves better than life itself.

The years have passed by swiftly, filled to the brim with loving service to God.

The children are all married. And he and Martha Ellen live in their small house in Rama, Indiana. Every penny of his adequate salary that he can spare goes into bricks for the beautiful little church he is building on a knoll nearby. Until it is built, his group of new believers are meeting in his home. (He has one room furnished with the same neat pews, pulpit, and walnut piano.)

They could have a beautiful home and live on the fat of the land, those two, Martha Ellen and Pete. But, like another man named Peter, he is a fisher of men.

And now at a time of life when most men play golf and smoke or swap questionable yarns and drink in their leisure hours, Pete sells bricks. Bricks for sale. Twenty-five cents each.