

Taste and See

A crowd of curious, expectant people gathered around the county courthouse in Salem, New Jersey. The county fair was in progress, and they jostled one another in eager anticipation, for they were about to witness a daring feat.

Soon a man appeared on the steps, holding in one hand a beautiful red-ripe fruit which had been part of the fair's decorations. Members of the crowd whispered excitedly to one another as he held it up for them to see.

"Is he really going to eat it?" some asked, incredulously.

The man was Colonel Robert Gibbon Johnson; the year was 1820; and the fruit was—a tomato, called in those days a love apple and considered deadly poison. Love apples were tokens of courtship or lawn decorations. Young men gave them to their girl friends, who would afterward wear the seeds in sachets around their necks. The fruit was admired for its beauty, but no one—repeat, no one—would dream of eating it.

The crowd gasped in horror as the colonel deliberately placed the tomato in his mouth, and ate it with apparent relish. They waited breathlessly, expecting soon to see him writhing in agony, dying on the courtyard steps.

But nothing like that happened. Instead—

He ate a second tomato, explaining, as he ate, that tomatoes were delicious either cooked or raw. He praised their color and texture. Then he invited the onlookers to join him in his meal, and a few of the braver ones went forward. Soon they too were pronouncing the tomatoes good.

The news spread rapidly, and eventually tomatoes graced most of the tables of the world, an accepted article of diet everywhere.

If Colonel Johnson had not eaten that tomato, it is possible that people would still be admiring "love apples" and shrinking with horror from the thought of tasting how good they are.

The Christian life is much the same. One could spend all his life admiring the lovely Jesus, and not know how really good He is—until he has tried Him. David challenged all to "taste and see that the Lord is good." Psalm 34:8—By Eugene Lincoln, Signs of the Times, March 1975.

Out of Nothing

The story is told of how once Frederick the Great, one of the most eccentric sovereigns who ever graced a European throne, was selecting a court chaplain. He advertised for a number of candidates, who preached before the court on successive Sundays. But the requirement was that each preacher should not know in advance what text he was to preach upon. As he was ready to ascend the pulpit, an officer of the court would step up and hand him an envelope; within that envelope was a slip of paper bearing a text; and from that text the candidate must preach.

On one Sunday the candidate for the day was handed his envelope; he ascended the pulpit; he opened the envelope, and took out the slip of paper. But it was blank. He examined it carefully to see if any markings had eluded him. But the scrap of paper bore not a single line.

Looking calmly at his audience, the preacher said, "The slip in my hand says nothing. Now, my brethren, God made the world out of nothing!" And he went right on to preach a stirring sermon on the creation.—By Gwynne Dalrymple, *Signs of the Times*, October 27, 1936.

He Knows My Name

I once heard about an old minister who was dying. A young man who was also a minister came to visit him and offered to read to him from the Scriptures.

"Do you have any favorite scripture you would like to have me read?" he asked.

"Yes," said the old man. "Please read the first chapter of First Chronicles."

The young man read the chapter of genealogies with a labored tongue. It was hard work pronouncing the some two hundred fifty unfamiliar names in the fifty-four verses. The old minister listened with eager attention to every name. When it was finished, he uttered a fervent Amen.

"Thank you, my son; that was so comforting."

The young man was frankly puzzled. "Please tell me," he said, "what is so comforting about the chapter?"

"Ah," said the old minister, "just to think that God knew them all by name!"—By Leonard C. Lee, *Signs of the Times*, June 26, 1956.

He Died For Me

One would hardly expect a Christmas story to emerge from the violence and sadism of a Nazi concentration camp. Yet the birth of Christ and His subsequent sacrificial death for all men take on new meaning for me after learning of the heroic deed of a Roman Catholic priest at Auschwitz.

On February 17, 1941, Franciscan priest Maximillian Kolbe, the first apostle of Poland, was imprisoned by the Gestapo (secret state police) and soon after brought to Auschwitz.

In those days it was the rule that ten innocent prisoners must die for one who escaped. As the escape of a prisoner was noted during the roll call at the end of July 1941, ten of Kolbe's group had to die, and these in the most cruel way--by death from starvation. Among the ten who had been selected, without consideration, one cried aloud, "Have mercy! I have a wife and children."

Kolbe stepped forward and offered himself to replace this head of a family and to go with the other nine into the hunger bunker. The commandant, surprised at such magnanimity, permitted the exchange. So the priest went with the other nine into the cell of death and became their comforter and preacher, their leader and example. He endured the terrible sufferings from hunger and exhaustion in full consciousness during two weeks; then they gave him a deadly injection. He died on August 14.

Prisoner No. 16670 was dead, but he for whom he sacrificed himself still lives today. One hardly need point out the obvious application of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's cross. He also died that we might live.--By Kenneth J. Holland, *Signs of the Times*, December 1987.

He Paid My Debt

During the siege of Plevna, the czar, in going around his camp to cheer his men, came across an officer who had fallen asleep while writing to his wife. He described his hard work and exposure in the trenches, but said these were nothing compared to his debts. "Who will pay my debts? He wrote, and while brooding over them, he fell asleep. The czar glanced over his shoulder, read the letter, and then wrote under the question, "I will, Alexander."

That's exactly what Jesus has done.—By William P. Pearce, Signs of the Times, February 7, 1922.

Rejected Pardon

Dr. Walter A. Maier, a nationally known minister and gospel broadcaster, tells us that about one hundred years ago in Pennsylvania a murderer by the name of George Wilson, who was sentenced to be hanged, was pardoned by President Andrew Jackson. But he was such a hardened criminal that he rejected the pardon, and insisted that it could never be legal and valid until he accepted it. President Jackson consulted the Supreme Court, and Chief Justice John Marshall read the following verdict:

"It is hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged."

And he was hanged, because he could accept or reject the pardon.

God offers us life eternal on the ground of faith in Christ. Will we accept it on these terms?—By H. M. S. Richards, Signs of the Times, August 24, 1943.

He Bent Low

In 1934 Edward, Prince of Wales, paid a visit to a small hospital in England where thirty-six hopelessly injured and disfigured war veterans were being tenderly nursed. At each bed he stopped, shook hands, and spoke a few encouraging words. After visiting twenty-nine of these unfortunates he was being conducted to the door when he said, "I understood you have thirty-six men here. I have seen only twenty-nine. Where are the other seven? The nurse gently explained that they were so terribly disfigured that it would be better if he did not see them. But the Prince insisted. He was again being led to the exit when he said, "I've seen only six men. Where is the seventh?"

"Oh, nobody sees that one," replied the nurse. "Please do not insist." But he did. And there lay a bundle of human flesh--blind and disfigured, a shocking sight.

The Prince stood speechless, his face white, his lips drawn. Then with cheeks wet with tears he bent low and kissed the wounded hero. That was wonderful. But God did something more wonderful. He Himself became the wounded Hero that we might be made His royal sons and daughters.--By R. Allan Anderson, Signs of the Times, April 1963.

I'm A Lost Man

Strangely enough, another will excuse himself by saying he is not good enough. "The Lord could never save a sinner like me!" he says despairingly.

When I hear a person make such a statement, I think of the young man who approached his spiritual adviser for help.

"Sir," the youth said, "I am a lost man."

"This is fine!" the minister replied.

The young man, thinking perhaps his friend did not understand him, repeated, "But I tell you I am a lost man!"

"This is good," the man of God assured him. "Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost!"

The Lord Jesus specializes in apparently hopeless cases. His power is not limited. He still saves "them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him." Hebrews 7:25--By Robert H. Pierson, *These Times*, January 1959.

A Caring Heart

Late one night--or rather, early in the morning--at the lonely hour of three o'clock, I sat in the waiting room of a bus depot. There were only three of us. One other waiting passenger, a tired-looking little grandmother--or great-grandmother--sat hunched on the other end of the bench from me. The too-thin gray coat she wore opened below the buttons to disclose a much-washed cotton dress. A long-used and dilapidated purse lay beside her on the seat. Her head bent forward finally, and she slept from weariness.

A boy, who appeared to be of high school age, sat on a bench across the room from us. Because of vicious crimes that had been committed in this city recently by teen-age boys, I found myself glancing at him somewhat apprehensively. Yet, he was cleanly dressed in neat brown slacks and a blue ski jacket. His hair was trimmed conservatively, which was reassuring to some extent.

Then I noticed that he was watching the little grandmother quite intently. I pretended to continue reading my magazine, but kept the boy under surveillance out of the corners of my eyes.

He took out his billfold, and rather restlessly, it seemed, examined its contents. His eyes shifted to the elderly lady's hands folded in her lap, to her neglected purse beside her, and back again to her hands. Once more he turned to his thin billfold, taking out what was clearly its entire contents, a one-dollar bill and a five-dollar bill, a picture of a girl, and his ticket. He counted the small change in his pocket, shook his head, rubbed his mouth, and glanced once more at the sleeping grandmother.

When he stood up, my heart began to pound. By now my full attention centered upon him, but, for some reason, he did not seem to be aware of my presence at all. As he walked toward the sleeping woman, I prepared to spring into action should his hand reach for her purse.

Did he dare, I wondered? He stood above the little woman, hesitating for an instant, his right fist closed. Then, lowering his hand, he slowly opened his fist, and a bill dropped into the cup formed by wrinkled hands on a worn gray coat.

It was not the one-dollar bill. It was the five.--By Grace Shults Davis, *These Times*, March 1968.

Always Ready

When the great explorer Shackleton was on his quest for the South Pole, he was at one time driven back, and was compelled to leave some of his men on Elephant Island, though he promised that he would return for them.

But when he endeavored to get back, he found a sea of ice between him and the island. What should he do? He had promised, and he must keep his word.

He tried to reach them, but failed. He tried again and again, but without success. Beyond the ice were his trusting companions, who had every confidence in him. They had only a few supplies with them. At that time of the year it seemed folly to hope for any favorable change in the weather, and he was told that there was absolutely no hope of getting his little boat, the "Yalcho," through the great ice barrier to Elephant Island.

He could not be inactive. He must reach his men; so at the risk of losing his boat and the lives of his crew, he pushed in nearer to the island; and unexpectedly there came an opening in the ice. He hurried in, rescued his men, and in an hour was back again with all on board. Had they been delayed only a few minutes, their frail vessel would have been destroyed by the crashing of the ice as it closed in.

When they were sure they were beyond danger and the nervous tension was over, Shackleton said to one of the rescued companions, "Well, you were packed and ready, weren't you?"

"Yes," came back the reply, "we never lost hope. We believed you would come for us, even though circumstances were unfavorable. You had promised, and we expected you; so each morning we rolled up our sleeping bags and packed all our equipment, that we might be ready." And now they were all safe and homeward bound, happy that they had been prepared daily.

Before Jesus departed from this world, He left a definite promise in John 14:1-4. The Lord is not slack concerning His promises.--By Charles L. Paddock, Signs of the Times, June 14, 1932.

The Counting Prayer

His father and mother were dead, and for years he had found his only home in an almshouse. He was still only a boy, a mere child. He had been educated--to count from one to ten.

Once a "good man" came to his home, the poorhouse, and told the story of Jesus, who longed to help all who were in trouble, especially children.

One day the little fellow was sent in search of a lost animal. His search proved futile, and by and by, tired and discouraged, he sat down to cry.

Then it was that he thought of Jesus, who wanted to help children; and remembering that he needed only to pray, he began to pour out his child heart to his Friend.

A gentleman was passing, and hearing a child's voice, a voice that spoke of trouble, he went to one side, peeped through the hedge, and listened.

He saw a child, with clasped hands and face turned upward. He heard him say, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten." Then the count was repeated.

"My little man, what are you doing?" he asked kindly.

"O, sir, I am praying to Jesus to help me find the horse." And his little face began to beam with the confidence which he had in Jesus.

Do you think, dear reader, that the Saviour heard that "counting" prayer? Could He hear the heart plea of a tired, ignorant, poorhouse boy? Was He able to find sense in words that of themselves meant nothing?

The horse was presently found. Sense or no sense, the boy's faith reached the great prayer central of the universe, and angels that excel in strength were sent to help.--By C. L. Taylor, Signs of the Times, January 27, 1914.

Putting Love on the Line

A North Dakota blizzard was howling outside Dr. Thompson's office one night. About nine o'clock the phone rang.

"Can you come out to my place?" Tony Sebastian was on the other end. "My boy is running a high fever and is unconscious. It's impossible for us to get in to you. Do you think you could make it out to us?"

"I'll do my best." The doctor glanced out the window. "But this storm scares me. Never had it so bad where I came from."

Stopping at a tavern on his way out of town, he got three men to go with him. "I may need you," he said, "to shovel me out of the snow."

About halfway the men gave up exhausted. The drifts kept getting deeper and deeper. So the doctor left his car with the men and got a farmer to saddle him a horse for the rest of the journey to Tony's.

The doctor did his best for the boy, but he saw toward morning that unless he could get him to a hospital under intensive care, survival would be hopeless. He thought of Ed, the county commissioner. Maybe he could get a crew out and clear the road.

"Don't think I can," said Ed, sleepily answering the phone. "But I'll try."

Imagine the doctor's surprise, when he got his patient out to the main road about sunrise, to find the doctor's car ready and waiting, and to learn that the road all the way into town had been cleared.

Later at the hospital, the crisis past, Dr. Thompson thought of Ed again and rang to thank him and the road crew for what they had done.

"Don't thank us," said Ed. "We had nothing to do with it."

"Who did then?" asked the doctor.

"Well," he said, "you've got to know the people around here to understand what happened. When they heard you ring me on the party line, they knew something must be wrong and they listened in. Every able-bodied man and boy along that road went to work shoveling and plowing snow. That's how it got done.

"You see, we live out here in God's wide-open country, where the coyotes howl and the wind blows free. And when anybody's in trouble, we all pitch in and help. We call it 'putting love on the line.' "

How desperately society needs old-fashioned love like that today, and the healing influence of neighbors who care.--By T. R. Torkelson, Signs of the Times, September 1973.

Treasure in Heaven

A merchantman, who was a Christian, was asked to help by a contribution to a certain work of a church. He gladly wrote a check for \$100 and gave it to the visitor.

At that moment a cable was brought in. The merchant read it and looked troubled.

"This cable," said he, "tells me that one of my ships has been wrecked and the cargo lost. That makes a difference in my business. I'll have to write you another check."

The visitor understood and handed back the check, and the merchant wrote out another and gave it to him. When he read it, he was utterly amazed. It was for \$300.

"Haven't you made a mistake?" the church worker asked.

"No," said the merchant, "I haven't made a mistake." Then, as his eyes filled with tears, he said: "That cable was a message from my Father in heaven. It read, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.' "--From Church Chimes, These Times, February 1962.

The Faith of Jesus

John Chrysostom was one of the great Greek church fathers. He was born in A.D. 347. The story is told how at an early age he was brought before the emperor to answer for his faith.

"If you persist in being a Christian," said the emperor, "I will banish you from your father's land."

Chrysostom's reply was respectful. He said: "Your majesty, you cannot; the whole world is my Father's land. You cannot banish me."

"Then I will take away all your property," said the emperor.

"You cannot do that either," replied Chrysostom. "My treasures are in heaven."

"Then I will send you to a place where there will not be a friend to speak to," said the emperor.

"You cannot do that, for I have a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. I shall have my Brother Jesus Christ forever."

Finally the emperor said, "I will take away your life."

To this Chrysostom answered, "You cannot do that either. My life is hid with Christ in God."

This was not blind obstinacy. It was faith--"the faith of Jesus" which will characterize the last witnesses of God's true church on earth. Revelation 14:12. We need such faith today.--By Roy Allan Anderson, Signs of the Times, March 1970.

Kill the Spider

No doubt you have heard of the old brother who used invariably to pray at the midweek church meeting, "Lord, since last we met together here, the cobwebs of sin have come between us and Thee. Lord, brush away the cobwebs."

Again and again he offered that petition; and then one night in the silence that followed, there was heard a voice praying, "Lord, kill that spider!"

Reformation, so far as Christianity goes, must work from the inside out. May God "kill that spider" in our lives today!--By Llewellyn A. Wilcox, Signs of the Times, January 26, 1937.

Stand Up for Jesus

Preachers seldom face as large an audience as confronted Dudley A. Tyng on a March day in 1858. More than five thousand men were gathered in Jaynes Hall in Philadelphia to hear the beloved rector. At the time the city was being stirred by a great revival.

There was a singular charm and appeal about this speaker. He seemed to find just the right words to satisfy the soul hunger of his listeners. He was so moving and convincing in his plea that he drew hundreds to those gatherings.

But three weeks later he was dead. The city was shocked when it read of the accident that had claimed him as its victim.

Mr. Tyng had gone to his home at Brookfield, near Conshohocken, Pennsylvania. One day he left his study, expecting to be gone only a few minutes, to look into the barn where a mule was being used to operate a corn sheller.

As he patted the animal on the neck, his clothing got caught in the machinery, and his arm was horribly mangled. The surgeons tried desperately to save him, performing three amputations, but it was all in vain. The beloved rector died within a few hours.

Shortly before he passed away, he was briefly conscious. Those by the bedside heard him whisper, "Tell them to stand up for Jesus." Undoubtedly it was the message he wanted carried to his friends in the minister's union who were conducting the city-wide revival.

There was one acquaintance in particular to whom these words came as a challenge. George Duffield, pastor of the Fifth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, had been the late rector's intimate associate and close fellow worker. To him it hardly seemed possible that one so beautiful in spirit and so dedicated to the Master's cause could have passed so abruptly from the scene.

When he attended the funeral, his friend's parting words kept ringing in his mind. The more he thought about them, the more urgent and impressive they became. It was as if his old associate were still alive, asking that his moving farewell message be translated into some enduring form of memorial. Mr. Duffield was not only touched by those words--he was genuinely inspired.

The following Sunday, when the time came for the sermon in his own church, Mr. Duffield preached from the text in Ephesians 6:14: "Stand therefore." At the close he read a poem he had written, "Stand Up! Stand Up for Jesus!"

Probably the author never dreamed that he had written a great hymn. A copy of the lines was given to his Sunday school superintendent, who in turn had them printed on a special leaflet so that they could be sung by all the children.

It could not stop there. The words seemed to fire men's souls throughout the land. When the author made a trip to the battlefield in Virginia a few years later, he was deeply stirred as he heard thousands of army men sing "Stand Up! Stand Up for Jesus!" Inspiring fresh courage and high resolve wherever it was sung, the hymn grew steadily in popularity.--By Vincent Edwards, *These Times*, May 1960.

Christmas in War Time

It was Christmas night. The French trenches were filled with weary men. A fine snow was falling. All was silent and calm. Suddenly an officer sprang to his feet and cried, "Get ready! It is almost time for the charge!"

The men aroused themselves. There was no complaining, but some of the men were crowding back tender memories of other Christmas nights when they were home with their loved ones in the midst of peace and good cheer.

Word came down the line that there were but five minutes left. The loyal sons of France tried in vain to forget their homes and loved ones. They gripped their rifles and waited for orders.

Then it happened. The stillness of the night was broken by the sound of men's voices singing in German. Every Frenchman grew tense. The song grew in volume. Its message, which in any language thrills the heart, was full of rest and comfort for the worn and weary soldiers:

Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright;
Round yon virgin mother and Child! Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Here and there a soldier lowered his rifle, his lips trembling as he recognized the song. Then the command was given: "Charge! Vive la France!"

Not a man moved forward. Something like a sob was the only response. The commanding officer was amazed. Again he prepared to issue the command, but paused; the words of the song had reached his ears also. He lowered his sword, and in a softened and subdued voice said, "Very well, no charge tonight. Let us also sing!"

At this season, in the midst of the vain strivings of this atomic age, our Saviour appeals to those whose hearts have been closed to His heavenly message of peace and good will. He wants their love and service. By His tender Spirit He is trying to awaken their acceptance of Him as their Saviour, too. Then, as they respond and accept Him, with joy they can join in the words of praise: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2:14--By John Walter Halliday, Signs of the Times, December 20, 1955.