



OVER THE GARDEN FENCE

1. NEW NEIGHBOURS

Young Mrs. Jones had just finished hanging out her washing, when her neighbour came out carrying a basket of clean, damp clothes.

“Good morning,” she called cheerfully, “How are you settling in?”

“Fine, thanks,” answered Mrs. Jones, “But it takes ages to get straight. I wonder if I ever shall?”

“Oh, you will,” Mrs. Deacon assured her. Mrs. Deacon was a woman in her fifties, with greying hair. “You don’t think you’ll find it too quiet here?” she asked anxiously.

“Well, it IS quiet. But there’s always something going on, they tell me. It’s the church fete on Saturday. Are you going?”

Mrs. Deacon hesitated.

“No,” she said. “We don’t belong to the church. We’re Christadelphians.”

“Christadelphians! Never heard of them. But that wouldn’t stop you going to the church fete, would it?”

“It would take more than a couple of minutes to answer that,” Mrs. Deacon laughed. “Look! When I’ve pegged these clothes out, I’m going to make a cup of coffee. Come round and have one with me, and we’ll have a chat.”

“What did you say you were? I’ve forgotten the name,” asked Mrs. Jones, as they sat drinking coffee, half an hour later.

“Christadelphians,” answered Mrs. Deacon. “Next Saturday we are going into town to push bills inviting people to come to our Sunday evening meetings. But in any case, we don’t agree with the things the church teaches, so, of course, we couldn’t support it.”

Mrs. Jones was puzzled. "Don't you believe the Bible?" she asked. "Rather! Every word of it," answered Mrs. Deacon with enthusiasm.



"Surely the teaching of the church is based on the Bible?"

"No, I'm afraid very often it isn't. Do you go to church?"

"Not as often as I should," admitted Mrs. Jones. "I used to go regularly before I was married, though."

"Did you ever hear a sermon preached on the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ?"

Mrs. Jones thought for a minute.

"No," she said, "I don't think I have. But, in any case, that's rather a fantastic idea, isn't it?"

"It's plainly taught in the Bible. There isn't anything in the Bible about men going to heaven when they die, you know. But there's a lot about Jesus coming back to the earth."

"It sounds far-fetched to me," Mrs. Jones insisted. Mrs. Deacon smiled.

"It sounded that way to me once," she said. "Do you remember the words of the angel, as the disciples watched Jesus ascend into heaven? You'll find them in Acts 1:11. Listen!" As she spoke, Mrs. Deacon had been turning the pages of her Bible, and now she read:

"'While they looked steadfastly up into heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.' He'll come back in the same way as he went. That's what the angels said. Angels wouldn't be mistaken, would they?"

Mrs. Jones considered this.

"It doesn't make sense," she said. "Why should Jesus come back to earth, if we are going to heaven to be with him when we die?"

“Can you think of a single verse in the Bible that speaks clearly and plainly of men going to heaven when they die?” Mrs. Deacon asked her.

“Well, no, I can’t. But I’m sure there must be some.” While she was thinking, Mrs. Deacon turned up a passage.

“Would you expect a man like David to go to heaven?” she asked.

“He’s called a man after God’s own heart, isn’t he? Yes, I should think so.”

“Then look at this verse. It’s Acts 2:34. It says, ‘David is not ascended into the heavens.’ And if you look back to verse 29, it tells us where he IS. The apostle Peter is speaking, and he says, ‘Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.’”

“That’s rather a bleak outlook,” protested Mrs. Jones. “I should prefer to believe I’m going to heaven when I die.”

“You remember the story of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead?”

“Yes, but I don’t see ...”

“You remember Martha said to Jesus, when at last He arrived at Bethany, ‘If you had been here, our brother wouldn’t have died’?”

Mrs. Jones nodded.

“Well, then Jesus answered her, ‘Your brother shall rise again.’ And Martha said, ‘I know he will rise again, in the resurrection, at the last day.’ If she had been wrong in speaking of a resurrection, don’t you think Jesus would have corrected her?”

“Well, yes. I suppose he would. And I suppose if the idea of a resurrection is true, then the idea of heaven-going can’t be. You can’t have both.”

Just then the door-bell rang.

“That’ll be the milkman. I want to see him. I shan’t be a minute,” said Mrs. Deacon, hurrying to the door. While she was gone, Mrs. Jones looked round the room. Her gaze was arrested by a photograph on the sideboard. It was of a couple probably in their early thirties, with a girl of eleven or twelve. The woman was so strikingly like Mrs. Deacon, she must be her daughter, Mrs. Jones decided.

“That’s a lovely photograph,” she said, when Mrs. Deacon returned. “Is it your daughter?” Mrs. Deacon answered that it was.

“And your grand-daughter?” Her neighbour nodded, but obviously did not wish to talk about them.

“I’ll find you another passage to prove the resurrection,” she said, changing the

subject. “Look at the 20th chapter of Luke. Some of the Jews of Jesus’ day didn’t believe in the resurrection.

They had been having an argument about it, and Jesus spoke these words. Look!” She pointed to the 37th verse, and read it aloud.

“‘Now that the dead are raised, even Moses sheweth at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him.’ You see his argument? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead. But God calls Himself their God. Because He intends to raise them, they are in His sight living already.”

“Yes, I can see that Jesus is proving the resurrection there.”

“There are a number of verses about it in the 5th chapter of John,” Mrs. Deacon added.

“Let me make a note of them,” said Mrs. Jones. “I’d like to read them over on my own, and think about them. It’s not easy to throw overboard ideas you’ve held all your life, you know.”

“Of course it isn’t. It’s not wise, either, until you’ve really thought about them.”

Mrs. Deacon found a pencil and paper, and wrote down the chapters she had mentioned.

“I’ll put down 1 Corinthians 15, too, for good measure. It’s often called the resurrection chapter.”

“I can see that you’ve got a good case!” Mrs. Jones smiled. “But I simply can’t understand how so many people can be wrong in their ideas. After all, most people do believe in going to heaven.”

“Not so many, these days. A lot don’t believe in anything at all. But I think the belief in going to heaven is partly because of the hymns children are taught when they are very little. Words like those in ‘Once in Royal David’s City ... And he leads his children on, To the place where He has gone.’” Mrs. Jones nodded. “It could be,” she said.

“And, of course, it’s a pleasant idea. We don’t like to think that death is the end; and we certainly don’t like to think of our friends and family perishing in death.”

Mrs. Deacon glanced at the photo on the sideboard, and for a moment or two her usually happy face was clouded.

Then she went on, “It’s useless to believe what isn’t true. The apostle Paul says, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God Hath prepared for them that love him.’ To be made perfect in body and mind, and to live for ever on this earth, when Jesus reigns supreme, is something to look forward to.” “Oh, goodness me!” Mrs. Jones suddenly caught sight of the clock.

“I shall have to fly. My twins will be home, and the dinner not ready tor them. Thanks for the coffee.”

“Come again, any time you feel like a chat,” said Mrs. Deacon.

“I will,” said Mrs. Jones.

And she did.



2. DIFFICULTIES FOR MRS. JONES

It had been a wet, depressing week. Now the rain was pouring down incessantly. Mrs. Deacon was busy in her kitchen, when she heard her next-door neighbour knocking on the back door.

“Mrs. Deacon!”

She put her head out cautiously.

“Oh, Mrs. Deacon, do come and have a cup of tea with me. I’m really fed up.”



“The weather’s not very inspiring, is it?” Mrs. Deacon remarked. “Just a minute. I’ll get my mack, and come round with you.”

She followed Mrs. Jones into her hall, and hung up her wet mack.

“Come into the sitting room. I’ve lit a fire to try and cheer things up a bit. I’ll go and make the tea.”

Mrs. Deacon, sitting in a comfortable chair by a warm fire, noticed at once that there was a Bible on the table.

“Been doing some reading?” she asked, as Mrs. Jones came back with the tea.

“Yes, lots! I’ve read those passages you gave me—and lots more. And I’ve been having arguments with Bob. It’s worried me quite a bit,” she confessed. “He thinks I’m getting a bit fanatical. He says it’s better to keep away from these newfangled religions.”

“New-fangled! Why, I think we’re nearer to the first disciples than any other sect in Christendom.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, for one thing we don’t have paid ministers. And each of our meetings is responsible for its own affairs—as the churches were in the first century. We really do try to live together like members of one family—brothers and sisters in Christ—that’s what the word ‘Christadelphian’ means, you know.”

“What about your services? Bob says he’s no time for those people who get carried away with emotion.”

“Then I think he’d like our meetings. They’re very simple, and straight-forward. In the morning we have a breaking-of-bread service—we break bread and drink wine as Christ commanded his followers to.”

“They do that in church. They call it Communion,” put in Mrs. Jones.

“That’s right. But every member of our meeting is there every Sunday, unless they are sick, of course, or have very young children. Then at night we have a meeting for preaching to anyone who will come to listen.

“Oh, yes!” Mrs. Jones suddenly remembered.

“Bob passed your meeting room one day, this week, and he saw a big notice up, saying ‘The Jews, God’s witnesses.’ He said THAT had nothing to do with being a Christian.”

Mrs. Deacon smiled.

“Let me have your Bible for a minute,” she said. She turned to John 4:22 and read, “Ye worship ye know not what. We know what we worship. Salvation is of the Jews.”

“Salvation is of the Jews,” she repeated. “Jesus said that. And if salvation is of the Jews, then we couldn’t have salvation without the Jews.”

“But I really can’t see why” protested Mrs. Jones. “Except, of course, that Jesus was a Jew,” she added doubtfully.

“It isn’t only that. The Jews are an important part of God’s purpose with the world. Have a look at Luke 21 in your Bible. You know that not many years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jerusalem was taken by the Romans, and the Jews were scattered all over the earth. For nearly 2,000 years they wandered from country to country, suffering continual persecution. The very fact that they have survived at all is a miracle. And all this was prophesied by Jesus. Look at Luke 21:24. Speaking of the Jews, He says, ‘They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ Now, after nearly 2,000 years, the Jews have been going back to their own land. In 1948 the state of Israel was formed in the land of Palestine.”

Mrs. Jones nodded.

“Yes,” she said, “I suppose that’s true, and I suppose in a way it’s remarkable; but I

don't see what it has to do with being a Christian."

"Would you say that the Kingdom of God has anything to do with being a Christian?" asked Mrs. Deacon.

"Yes, it must have—because Jesus taught us to pray, 'Thy Kingdom come.' Oh, yes, and it says Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God."

"Right!" said Mrs. Deacon. "Did you know that God's kingdom did once exist on earth?" Mrs. Jones shook her head, and she went on, "You remember how, when Samuel the prophet was an old man, the Jews didn't want his sons to be their judges after his death, but asked God to give them a king. And when Samuel mourned over this, God said to him, 'They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.' In other words, God said, 'I'm their king, and they don't want me.'"

Mrs. Jones was not convinced.

"But how could God be their king?"

"He gave them their laws. He ruled them through judges, whom He chose. When they did evil as a nation, he punished them. When they went after other gods, He sent a prophet to bring them back to Him. Even when they had a king, he was spoken of as 'sitting on the throne of the Lord.'"

"H'm! But even then, what has it to do with being a Christian?"

"Can't you see? When Christ comes back, He will make Israel once more the Kingdom of God. Remember the promise of the angel to Mary? 'He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.' That's in the first chapter of Luke."

"Oh, dear! I must get a pencil and paper, and make a note of these verses," said Mrs. Jones, sighing and smiling at the same time.

"The early Christians expected Christ to restore the Kingdom of God, you know. They said to him after his resurrection, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?' That's in Acts 1," Mrs. Deacon said. "Now you read on a bit in that chapter in Luke 21. Read from verse 25."

Mrs. Jones began to read aloud, "And there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." She paused a minute. "Men's hearts failing them for fear — they certainly do that today," she commented. Mrs. Deacon nodded.

"Read the next verse," she said.

“Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.”

“The Jews are back in their land—that’s a great sign that the return of the Lord is near. The trouble in the world is another. And when He comes, He’ll say to those who have been faithful to Him while he’s been away, ‘Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Why! it all ties up!” Mrs. Jones sounded thrilled; but soon looked worried again. “But I’ll never make Bob see it. I’m sure I won’t. I remember another thing he didn’t like. He said you called your church an ‘ecclesia’. He wanted to know what was the matter with the word ‘church’?”

“I wonder how he knew that? He’s a stickler, that husband of yours,” laughed Mrs. Deacon.

“There is a very good reason, though,” she went on. “The word ‘church’ is a translation of the Greek word ‘ecclesia.’”

“Then why don’t you use the English word?” asked Mrs. Jones. “It would make things easier.”

“The word ‘church’ has come to mean a building. When it was first used by the Jews, it meant a number of people who were separated from the rest. The Jews, when they had come out of Egypt, were called the ‘ecclesia in the wilderness.’ And, of course, when it says in the New Testament, ‘The church that is at Ephesus—or Philippi—or anywhere else—it means the people, not the building. It’s not the stained glass windows and fine stonework that make our church—many of our meeting-rooms are rather drab. It’s the people, called out by God to worship and serve Him who make up the ecclesia, or church. So we use the word ‘ecclesia’, because it expresses what we really are.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Deacon looked out of the window. “Look,” she said, it’s stopped raining; the sun’s trying to shine. I shall have to be going. Would you like me to give you a Bible Reading

Table? We all read from it each day. By following it, you read two portions in the Old Testament and one in the New, each day. And in the course of the year you read right through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice. We call it a Bible Companion. Would you like one?”

“Yes, please. I feel I want to read more. But Bob won’t like it. Sometimes I make up my mind that I won’t have any more to do with it. And yet it’s all so interesting, and it makes such good sense—I can’t help myself.”

Mrs. Deacon got up to go.

“I’ll pass you one of those Companions over the fence,” she said. “And don’t you worry about your husband. Just be patient. He’s obviously thinking about what you’ve

told him. Don't try to hurry him."

"Easier said than done. We've always shared each other's interests," Mrs. Jones said with feeling.

"And you'll share this in time, if you're only patient. Don't try to rush him, or you'll drive him further away. Pray that God will help him to see things as you are beginning to," counselled Mrs. Deacon wisely.

"It's a funny thing. I'm wanting to pray more than I've ever done in my life before," Mrs. Jones confided. "Thank you for coming. I feel much better now. You've cheered me up no end."



3. MORE TROUBLE

It was Mrs. Deacon's birthday. Half-a-dozen cards on the sideboard bore witness to this fact. It was a lovely afternoon, and she was out in the garden, weeding with a new tool—one of a fine new set her husband had given her for a birthday present.

As she stood up to rest for a few minutes, she caught sight of Mrs. Jones, standing at her kitchen door. She wasn't looking very happy. Mrs. Deacon smiled and waved her hand. Mrs. Jones came out into the garden slowly.

"Come on round, and have a cup of tea, and tell me what the trouble is."

"No, thank you. I don't think ... yes, I will. A talk will do me good."

In spite of her worries, she noticed immediately the cards on Mrs. Deacon's sideboard.

"Your birthday?" she asked. "You've got some lovely cards. I like that one, with the puppies on. Aren't they sweet?"

"That's from my grand-daughter. She loves animals. At least, she used to." Mrs. Deacon hesitated, then went on, "We only hear from her now at Christmas and birthdays. Just a card. Her mother and father were killed in a motor accident four years ago. She'll be sixteen this year. It's a sad story—I'll tell you about it some day. But there! You came in to tell me your worries, not to listen to mine."

"Oh! It's Bob. I told him I wanted to go to your meeting next Sunday night."

"You did! And didn't he like it?"

"Like it! He said if I went, I'd have to take the children. I don't mind that, of course. But he said I needn't ask for the car. There aren't any buses on Sunday, so he knew I couldn't get in without it. And he hardly spoke to me for the rest of the evening."

Mrs. Deacon considered. Then she said,

"You ought to be very grateful, you know."

"Grateful!" echoed Mrs. Jones, "Whatever for?"

"Well, from what you've told me, your husband obviously has some interest in religion. He wouldn't get so mad if he hadn't. Not many men take any interest at all these days. Do you know what I think?"

"No," answered Mrs. Jones doubtfully.

"I think he's kicking against the pricks. I think he sees there's a lot in what you've told him, and he's afraid to admit it."

"I only hope you're right," the younger woman answered earnestly. "Actually, he's

always been more interested in religion than I have. But he just won't listen to anything from the Old Testament. He says its all myths."

"He believes the New Testament?" asked Mrs. Deacon.

"He believes in Christ's teaching. He really tries to live up to it, more than anyone I know. That's what makes it so hard. But he doesn't believe in miracles."

"He doesn't believe in miracles? What about the resurrection?"

"I don't know."

"But," Mrs. Deacon said, "If you can prove the resurrection, then you've proved a lot of other things too."

"Such as?"

"Well, you've proved that miracles can happen. If God once broke the laws of nature, in order to bring back a man from the dead, then we must admit that He can break them at any time, for any purpose He sees fit. And there was a purpose in the miracles. They were wonderful works of healing, but they were more than that. Here was a man standing up and saying he was the Son of God. It was a stupendous claim. The miracles helped to prove the truth of that claim."

"Yes, I can see that, although I never thought of it before."

"Then, again, if the resurrection took place, it proves that Jesus really was God's Son. And if he was God's Son, then every word he spoke had the authority of God behind it."

Mrs. Jones nodded.

"But first, you have to prove the resurrection," she pointed out.

"It's not SO difficult. Think about it. There was a dead body in a sealed tomb. The sworn enemies of the dead man had set a watch, to be sure he stayed in the tomb. The story the guards told was hardly likely to be made up. And you can be quite sure that if it had been humanly possible to produce the body, the Jews would have done so."

"But they said the disciples stole the body while they slept," objected Mrs. Jones.

"The leaders of the Jews told their guards to say that. It's hardly likely, is it, that the disciples could have overcome the guards? And even if they had, there would have been little point in it. Their Lord had been given a proper burial; a dead body would have been no use to them. Apart from the fact that stealing it would have been extremely dangerous; and hiding it even more so."

"I know," agreed Mrs. Jones. "I've always believed it myself. The whole story has the ring of truth about it. But it's Bob. It never mattered before that he didn't believe, but now, somehow, it does."

“People who don’t believe the resurrection have some explaining to do, too, you know,” said Mrs. Deacon, smiling.

“How do you mean?”

“They have to explain why a small group of men, who were terrified and dejected, and ran away when their master was taken prisoner, became fearless and full of joy; and were ready to speak of the Lord’s resurrection even if it meant death. If the whole story hadn’t been true, they’d never have been able to do it.”

“There’s a point there,” said Mrs. Jones. “And if they hadn’t preached boldly there wouldn’t have been any Christian church. You’ve got to explain away the history of Christianity, if you reject the resurrection. I’ll put that to Bob—if he’ll listen.”

“And once you can get him to accept the resurrection, he’s bound to accept the Old Testament.”

Mrs. Jones looked doubtful.

“I wish you were right, but I really can’t see why. Lots of people accept the resurrection without believing the Old Testament.”

“That’s because they haven’t thought very much about it. Or read their Bibles, either. You’ll agree that if Jesus came out of the grave after being dead three days, that proves him to be the Son of God?”

Mrs. Jones nodded.

“Then, if he is the Son of God, everything he said is true. Now he said a great deal that proves he believed in the Old Testament.” Mrs. Deacon was enjoying herself. She loved talking about the Bible, and she had such a good listener in Mrs. Jones.

“He spoke about Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; he talked about the days of Noah and the flood; he met the temptation in the wilderness by quoting three times from the book of Deuteronomy. He said quite plainly that the Scripture cannot be broken.”

“What about the garden of Eden?”

“Yes, he spoke about that. He said, ‘Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female?’ That brings up another point. I suppose Bob believes in evolution?”

“No,” answered Mrs. Jones, “Oddly enough he doesn’t. He’s read a great deal about it, and he says there isn’t any real proof at all. He used to talk to me a good bit about it, but I can’t say I was ever very interested.”

“It’s a bit too scientific for me, too,” Mrs. Deacon agreed, “But John studied it quite a bit at one time. I’m sure, though, that the Bible account of the Creation is true, though it tells the story simply, and leaves out many details. It tells us all we need to know.”

Mrs. Jones looked at her watch.

“I must be going,” she said. “I promised the children some Welsh cakes for tea. I’ll just have time to make them, before they get in from school.”

“I’ve a booklet here about the resurrection of Jesus. Would you like to take it with you?”

“Yes, I would, thanks. If Bob won’t read it, I will. What shall I do about Sunday, though?” she asked, suddenly remembering her troubles!

“It’s only Tuesday now. Don’t do anything yet. We’ll pray about it, and I’ll see you later in the week.”

“You are good to me,” Mrs. Jones said impulsively.

“It’s grand to find someone so interested in the Bible. There aren’t many people who have time for it these days. But you’d better go now, and get those Welsh cakes done! Here, don’t forget the booklet.”

Mrs. Jones went back to her baking with a lighter heart.



4. PROBLEMS SOLVED AND UNSOLVED

Wednesday night was Bible Class night for the Deacons.

“I enjoyed the class tonight,” Mrs. Deacon said, as they drove home about 9 p.m.

“Yes, old Philip brought out some good points in that chapter on Hebrews,” answered her husband.

They drove on in silence for a while, then Mrs. Deacon said, “I’ve been thinking a lot about Jean lately. She’ll be sixteen in a month’s time. I suppose she’ll be going to work, you know. I’ve prayed for her every day for four years. Surely she can’t have forgotten her Sunday School lessons, and all she learnt from her mother and father. It all meant so much to Ruth and Robert.”

Mr. Deacon answered thoughtfully, “I sometimes wonder whether we did right in letting her go completely. But we thought it was best at the time.”

As they drew near home, they noticed a large shiny car outside the Jones’ house.

“My word! A Humber Hawk! The Joneses have posh visitors,” Mr. Deacon remarked. “They have visitors in a posh car. That might not be the same thing,” Mrs. Deacon said shrewdly.

“True,” her husband agreed.

When you live in the town, people come and people go. But when you live in the country, no-one comes or goes unnoticed—especially in a Humber Hawk. Next morning Mrs. Deacon heard more about the visitors.

No sooner had Mrs. Jones seen her husband off to work, and her children off to school, than she came hurrying round to Mrs. Deacon.

“What do you think?” she asked.

“I don’t know, but I should say it’s something good,” said Mrs. Deacon; she hadn’t seen Mrs. Jones looking so happy for a long time.

“I’ll say it is. You told me to pray, and I did, but I didn’t expect an answer like this.”

“Come on, then, don’t keep me in suspense,” laughed Mrs. Deacon.

“Well, we had visitors last night.

“Yes, we saw the car outside when we came home from Bible Class.”

“It was Judith, an old school friend of mine, and her husband. We haven’t seen them since they got married, about six months ago. You’ve no idea how much she’s changed.”

“In what way?” asked Mrs. Deacon.

“She used to be nice and ordinary like us—you know what I mean. But now—it’s all houses, and cars, and everything that money can buy. Her husband is rather well off. Her parents are such nice people; they used to go to church regularly. And she did. I don’t know how it was, but we somehow got on to the question of religion. We had such an argument. You’ve no idea! She thought the views I put forward were preposterous. But somehow I managed to think of the right verses every time.”

Mrs. Deacon nodded.

“It does happen like that sometimes,” she said.

“The Kingdom of God came up. I remembered what you said about there being a Kingdom of God in the past. I even remembered those verses in Ezekiel 21.”

“I know. Where it says, ‘Thus saith the Lord God; remove the diadem, and take off the crown; this shall not be the same; exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.’”

“That’s right! And I linked it up with Luke 1:32, where it says ‘The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.’ Then we got on to the subject of immortal souls.”

“People don’t like giving up the idea of having an immortal soul,” commented Mrs. Deacon.

“They don’t, do they? Judith got really annoyed about it. But she wouldn’t stop arguing. I’ll tell you one verse I had a bit of difficulty with. It’s the one about the many mansions.”

“You mean the second verse of John 14. ‘In my father’s house are many mansions.’ That word ‘mansions’ would be better translated ‘abiding places.’ Further down the same chapter, where Jesus says, ‘We will come and make our abode with him’—that word is the same as in verse 2. I think it means places in God’s Kingdom. Jesus goes on to say, ‘I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.’ It fits with the rest of scripture. Jesus is in heaven, over-ruling things on earth, until the time for him to come back. Then, he’ll give his disciples a place in his kingdom.”

“I see. Well, I didn’t know that. But I think I put up a good case. Judith got mad in the end, and said SHE wouldn’t want to join a stupid little sect like the Christadelphians. It was 1 o’clock before they went.”

“But where does the good news come in?” asked Mrs. Deacon, puzzled.

“I’m coming to that. After they’d gone, I felt dead beat. I just slumped in the chair and shut my eyes.”

“Yes, it’s like that. The excitement carries you along at the time. Then afterwards, you feel worn out,” sympathised Mrs. Deacon.

“Bob hadn’t said much all the evening. He went into the kitchen, and fetched me a strong cup of tea, and — do you know what he said?” Mrs. Jones asked the question as if she could hardly believe it herself.

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” answered Mrs. Deacon.



“He said, ‘Mary, old girl, I’m coming with you to that meeting on Sunday evening.’ You told me to pray about it, and I did, but I never thought it would work out like this. He said he realised that I was putting up sound arguments, and that Judith just couldn’t answer them. And he was surprised that I didn’t get nettled too. I usually do in an argument.”

“I’m so glad. That certainly solves a big problem for you. And it’s a great experience to share— learning the truth together.”

They were silent for a few minutes, then Mrs. Jones caught sight of the photograph on the dresser, and remembered something.

“You promised that you’d tell me about your grand-daughter some time,” she said.

“So I did. Well, I’ll tell you now. I told you our only daughter, Ruth, and her husband were killed in a car crash. Ruth met Robert on a Bible Campaign in Scotland, and when they were married she went to live up there, near Glasgow. They used to come down to us for three weeks every summer. Robert had a good job. His parents were well-off, too.”

“Were they Christadelphians?” asked Mrs. Jones.

“No. They were most upset when Robert ‘went religious’, as they called it. They threatened to have no more to do with him ... he had a hard time of it. But he and Ruth were very happy together. You can imagine how much we looked forward to their visit each year, and to seeing Jean. Look!” She pointed to some marks on the kitchen door. “See where we marked how she had grown each year.”

“And what about the crash?” Mrs. Jones asked gently.

“It was on their way home from a holiday with us. They were nearly home. Jean was in the back seat— she wasn’t badly hurt, though she must have been terribly shaken. She was rather a nervous, highly-strung child.

They got in touch with Robert’s mother and father. It was all over before we knew, and Jean had been taken to live with them—Mr. and Mrs. McMahn.”

“Surely you could have done something about it. You had as much right to her as they.”

“As much, yes, but no more. We didn’t know what to do. We were going through a bad patch financially at the time, and we just couldn’t, afford to go all that way. And if we could have gone, I doubt if we could have done anything. We exchanged one or two letters, but it was quite obvious that they intended to bring her up their way. And they could give her so much more than we could.” Mrs. Deacon sighed. “Yet I feel sure she’d have been happier with us. They said it would be better if we didn’t write, as our letters unsettled the child. And they wouldn’t let her write to us. She was only eleven then. She’ll be sixteen this summer. We’re thinking of writing to the McMahn’s to see if they’ll let her come down later in the year for a holiday.”

“If you pray for her, God will answer, won’t he?” suggested Mrs. Jones.

“We’ve prayed every day for four years. God will, certainly answer: true, but his answer may be ‘No!’ or it may be ‘Wait.’

“There’s nothing harder than waiting,” said Mrs. Jones wisely.



5. THE HEART OF THE MATTER

It was Tuesday evening. Mrs. Jones' little sitting room was bright with flowers picked by the twins, Peter and Ann. Comfortable chairs waited expectantly, and on the table were two rather new-looking Bibles.

In the kitchen. Bob Jones was hurrying his lively youngsters off to bed, while his wife finished clearing the tea-things.

"By the way, love," she said; "Mrs. Deacon said it will be nearer eight o'clock than 7.30 when Mr. Deacon comes in, as he's been delayed at work."

"Good! Dad, you'll have time for a pillow-fight," shouted Peter; then, turning to his sister, "Race you upstairs!"

There was a sound of stampeding on the stairs, then shrieks and bangings; but in less than ten minutes, all was quiet. Mr. Jones came down looking somewhat dishevelled.

Soon after, Mr. Deacon came round to the back door, carrying his Bible.

"We're all ready," said Mrs. Jones, "Come in the sitting room."

It had been arranged the previous Sunday that Mr. Deacon should spend an hour with the Jones's on Tuesday evenings, discussing Bible questions, and explaining to them the beliefs of the Christadelphians.

"There's one thing that puzzles me," said Bob, when they were comfortably seated. "Mary has talked to me a lot about your beliefs, and I've been to several of your meetings, but I haven't heard the cross of Christ mentioned at all."

Mr. Deacon nodded his head.

"That is a charge sometimes levelled against us," he said. "I think it's partly because all the Christian churches accept the cross; I suppose we tend to spend more time on the points on which we differ—the fact that man has no immortal soul, the second coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God on earth, and so on."

"But the death of Christ on the cross is vitally important, isn't it?"

"It's the heart of everything. Without it, nothing makes sense. So, if you like, we'll begin there tonight."

They both nodded, and Bob said, "It's something that's always seemed difficult to me. I can't see why a man who never sinned should have to die for other people."

"But what would have happened to those other people', including you and me, if he hadn't? The apostle Paul tells us 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' 'All have sinned,' he repeated, 'And the wages of sin is death.' That's the last verse of Romans 6. That was the tragedy of Adam's sin. It didn't only bring death on him, and on his immediate family. It made it easy for all the men and women coming

after him to disobey God too, so that no-one could live without sinning. Let's have a look at Romans 5."

They turned up the chapter in their Bibles.

"Verse 12," said Mr. Deacon, and started to read it.

"'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' Now, verse 18. Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

"That's a difficult verse," commented Mrs. Jones.

"Well, what the apostle is saying is this. Because Adam sinned, all the men and women that have come after him have also sinned—and they've died, as he did. But Jesus didn't sin—he lived a perfectly upright life in God's sight. Where Adam had failed, the Lord Jesus succeeded.

"But it wouldn't have been easy, even for him, would it?" Mrs. Jones said thoughtfully.

"Gosh! No!" said Bob. "With all that power in his hands, it must have been a terrific struggle. He could easily have used it for his own good; to get out of all the suffering, and make himself great and powerful."

"He could have done," agreed Mr. Deacon. "The Bible says that he was 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' Through his perfect life, all men may have a hope of living for ever. But that life is a gift—not something which is ours by right."

"Look back at the last verse of Romans 6," he went on. "The apostle tells us there that the wages of sin is death. Death is something we earn. But the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"But why that awful death on the cross?" protested Mrs. Jones.

"We're coming to that. Men could do nothing at all to help themselves. They sinned, and they died. They could find no way back to God, because, being sinners, they couldn't even come near Him. So they were completely and utterly dependent on God's love and grace to save them.

Now, if God had asked men to do some good or great thing to save themselves, or to observe numerous laws, they could have boasted that they had earned life by their own efforts.

So He chose another way. In His own time, He sent His Son into the world; and his perfect life was offered up as a sacrifice, not to appease God, but as an acknowledgment that God had been right in condemning sinful men to death. In effect, Jesus was saying on the cross, 'This is what human nature deserves, even at its very best.'"

They were silent for a minute or two, thinking, then Mr. Deacon went on, “If God had chosen an easier way for Jesus, it wouldn’t have had such a drawing power. It’s his sinless and loving obedience under the severest trials that draws us to him. He said himself, ‘If I be lifted up from the earth (on the cross) I will draw all men unto me.’

Since Jesus never sinned, and death is the result of sin, God raised him to life again—to immortal life, so that he could never die again. In him, the Father had provided a way of life.”

The pause that followed was broken by a sound of shuffling feet on the stairs; there was a knock on the door, and a forlorn little figure in blue pyjamas stood in the doorway. It was Anne.

“Mummy, I don’t feel well,” she said.

“You were perfectly all right half an hour ago,” remarked her father, unsympathetically.



“My head aches, and I’m hot,” she protested.

Mrs. Jones went over and put her hand on Anne’s forehead.

“She IS hot. Probably sickening for chicken-pox. There’s a lot of it around. I shan’t be long.”

She took Anne by the hand, and led her back upstairs. Then she got her a cool drink and soothed and comforted her. When she came down again, she apologised to Mr. Deacon.

“Don’t worry,” he said, smiling. “You can’t help things like that. We’ll leave it there until next week. I hope the little girl will be all right. I’ll ask Mrs. Deacon to pop round first thing in the morning, shall I?”

“I would be grateful if you would,” Mrs. Jones said. “If it’s chicken-pox, Peter’s bound to get it, too!”



6. A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Mrs. Jones awoke very early the next morning, to see a small figure standing by her bed, stretching out two arms and announcing proudly, "I've got chicken-spots."

"You certainly have," said her mother, looking at the rash on her arms. "Here, you'd better get in with me for a bit."



"I shan't be able to go to school now, shall I?" asked Anne hopefully.

"No, you can't go to school with chicken-pox. We'll have to ask the Doctor to call tomorrow."

"What about Peter?" Anne went on.

"Never mind about Peter now. Turn over and go to sleep. It's very early."

Anne sighed contentedly, and turned over. It was worth having chicken-pox, she decided, to be allowed in bed with Mum.

As it happened, she had the illness very slightly; but two days later Peter woke up simply smothered in spots. He had the disease much more severely than his sister.

With her two children ill, Mrs. Jones was very thankful for the help offered by Mrs. Deacon, both in sitting with the children, and in fetching shopping for her.

"Could you possibly come in to-morrow," she asked one morning. "I must get into Oxbridge some time."

"In the morning, yes. I'm going to Bristol after dinner. The daughter of an old friend of mine is being immersed to-morrow evening."

"Immersed?" queried Mrs. Jones.

"Yes—baptised."

"Oh, you mean christened."

"No, I don't," smiled Mrs. Deacon. "It's not the same thing, you know."

Mrs. Jones looked very doubtful.

“Look, I daren’t stop now, much as I’d like to. I’ll ask John to talk about it tonight, shall I? That’s if it’s all right for him to come in.”

“Oh, yes! Yes, please. We’re expecting him,” said Mrs. Jones.

* * * * *

“My wife tells me you’re not very clear about the meaning of baptism,” said Mr. Deacon, that evening, settling himself down in an easy chair.

“That’s right,” nodded Mrs. Jones.

“First I heard of it,” muttered Bob.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you, Bob. Never mind. Go on, Mr. Deacon.”

Bob pulled a wry face, which made Mr. Deacon laugh, but he was soon serious again.

“It follows on from what we were saying last week,” he said. “You remember we were speaking about the way in which God provided a way of life in Jesus Christ.

“John, in his gospel, says, ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of men.’ Let’s have a look at it; it’s in John 1:4.”

Bob and Mary turned the passage up in their new Bibles, while Mr. Deacon found it in his, which was old and well-thumbed. He read the fourth verse.

“Now on to verse 12. ‘But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.’ God has provided the way; we have to believe in it.”

“Ah, now,” said Bob, “We’ve got a fellow at work who’s always saying, ‘Only believe, and you shall be saved.’ Doesn’t sound right to me.”

Mr. Deacon smiled. He liked Bob’s blunt way.

“Well, it’s like this,” he said. “If I were to tell you there’s a burglar in this district, and he’s planning to break into your house, you wouldn’t believe me, would you?”

“Don’t think so. It wouldn’t be worth his while.”

“So you wouldn’t do anything about it. But if you DID believe me ...”

“Ah,” said Bob, “Then I’d lock and bolt all the doors and windows all right, and I’d arm myself with a big stick.”

“Of course you would. If we REALLY believe anything—then we act accordingly. So, if we really believe in God’s work of salvation in Jesus, then we’re bound to do

something about it.”

“What are we bound to do i” asked Mrs. Jones.

“Anything God asks us to. You remember we read a verse in Isaiah 53, where it said ‘All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all’? Well, we all begin life by going our own way. When we come to know and understand what God has done for us, we have to turn round the other way—God’s way. That’s what the word ‘converted’ means. Turned round. Instead of going our own way, we follow Jesus. It’s a new way of life, and it begins with baptism.”

“I always thought that baptism was what happened to babies when they were taken to church and sprinkled with water—though I never could see what good it did them,” commented Bob.

“Oh, Bob,” said his wife reproachfully.

“No, honestly, I’m not being irreverent. We had our kids christened, didn’t we. But I can’t see what difference it can make.”

“You’re quite right, Bob. Christening—which is the word the church uses for its own form of baptism—can’t do any good. Baptism has to come after belief. Do you know the story of the Ethiopian eunuch? It’s in the 8th chapter of Acts. Let’s have a look at it.”

He turned up the passage, and began to read at verse 27.

“‘And he arose and went: and behold a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou redest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.’”

“Now,” said Mr. Deacon, “The eunuch was reading that same 53rd chapter of Isaiah. So Philip explained to him how it speaks of the work of Jesus. As they went along, they came to ‘a certain water’, as it says in v. 36. Then the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?’

Notice Philip’s answer. ‘If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.’ The Ethiopian had evidently understood Philip’s teaching, because he answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.’ Then they both went into the water together, and Philip baptised the eunuch.”

“Baptism in the Bible sense,” Mr. Deacon went on, “has nothing to do with sprinkling babies. It means being dipped completely in the water. It is the word that was used when a piece of cloth was dyed—and you know how completely cloth must be

immersed before it takes a dye.”

“There’s a good reason why God asks us to be baptised as a start to a new life. Jesus died for us, and rose to a perfect life. When we are baptised, we are buried—not in a tomb as he was, but in water. When we come up from the water, it is as though we were ‘raised from the dead.’ It says in Romans 6, ‘We are buried with him by baptism i into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.’ So baptism is a symbol.”

“And a new start,” said Bob. “But, you know, it wouldn’t be long before we blotted our copy-book again, would it?”

Once again, Mr. Deacon smiled. “We’re always ‘blotting our copy-books’,” he said. “But God knows how impossible it would be for us to be perfect. When we do wrong, he forgives us, if we ask him to, for Jesus’ sake.”

They talked for some time, and then Mrs. Jones said, “I’m going to make a cup of coffee before you go. You will have one, won’t you?”

“Of course he will. You don’t want me to help, do you?” and, taking it for granted that the answer was ‘no’, he turned to ask Mr. Deacon some further questions.



7. JEAN COMES HOME

The summer months passed quickly. Mr. and Mrs. Jones now went every Sunday evening to the Christadelphian Hall in Oxbridge; and looked forward to Mr. Deacon's visit every Tuesday.

"I never imagined," Mrs. Jones said to Mrs. Deacon one morning, "that the Bible could be such an interesting book. We do our readings together every night now; we wouldn't miss them for anything."

While she was speaking, the mail van drew up, and the postman came up the path and handed a letter to Mrs. Deacon. It was a blue envelope, with the address written in a handwriting that she recognised; and the postmark confirmed her guess.



She stood staring at it, unable to speak for sometime. At last she said quietly, "It's from Jean."

"I'll leave you to read it then. You can tell me how she's getting on later."

Mrs. Deacon went into her kitchen and sat down. She opened the letter with trembling hands. There were two sheets, carefully written in neat round handwriting.

"Dear Nanny and Grandad," it began, "By the time you get this letter, I shall be on a coach on my way to Bristol. The coach gets to Bristol at 7 p.m., and I expect I will be able to get a bus to Oxbridge.

I have run away. Please don't be cross. I'm sixteen now, and I just can't go on another five years before I'm allowed to go to the meeting.

I've asked and asked, but they won't let me. They say, 'Wait until you're twenty-one, and see how you feel then.'

They've been very kind to me. They've given me everything I wanted—more than I wanted! Clothes, parties, holidays—everything. I hate to hurt them.

I've tried so hard to think what was right. And I've prayed. Sometimes I felt so cut off—but my best friend at school is a Christadelphian. Ever since we started at the school, when we were eleven, she's shared her Sunday School lessons with me; then last month she was baptised. I wanted so much to be baptised too. I didn't know what to do. I know Granny McMahn will never give her consent, so I thought the only

thing to do was to run away.

I left them a letter telling them where I was going, and thanking them for what they have done for me. Please try to understand. I suppose it was wrong to run away—but if I stayed I'd be counting the days until I was twenty-one, and could leave them.

I've learnt shorthand-typing; I'm sure I can get a job in Oxbridge, and I'm just longing to see you again.

All my love from
Jean."

Mrs. Deacon stared at the letter as if she couldn't believe it. How worried the McMahns would be. Yet, if Jean came to them of her own free will, could they make her go back again? And how wonderful it would be to see her grand-daughter again. She must talk things over with her husband. She didn't like bothering him when he was at work; but this was urgent.

"Do you think we'll have to send her back?" she asked him anxiously over the phone.

"She's made a deliberate choice. I'm not sure. The McMahns are her official guardians. I think it will depend on their attitude. Anyway, the first thing is to get her here. There aren't any buses out of Bristol after 7 o'clock. We'll have to go and meet her. I'll come home early, and we'll set off about 5.30."

"He's as thrilled as I am," Mrs. Deacon smiled to herself as she hurried off to get the spare room ready.

On the drive to Bristol they were quiet, anticipating the coming meeting. They still remembered Jean as they had last seen her—a lively, long-legged little girl of eleven. Now, as she stepped from the coach, she looked very different—a tall, fair young lady so much like her mother that, as Mrs. Deacon said afterwards, it gave her a real turn.

Jean took one look at the two kind, anxious faces, and the tension of the past days was broken. She burst into tears. Mrs. Deacon took her arm gently, and led her to the waiting car.

After supper, they sat round the fire and talked. Mr. Deacon explained to Jean that, much as they would like to keep her, Mr. and Mrs. McMahn were her legal guardians, and they would have to give their consent.

Her grandfather promised to write and put the position to them that very evening, as soon as Jean had gone to bed. It wasn't an easy letter to write; it took him until well past midnight. He tried to explain about Jean's great interest in the meetings; and pointed out that her mother and father would have wished above all things that she should be allowed to grow up with a love for the Bible, and a knowledge of its teachings.

He and his wife, he said, would like nothing better than to keep Jean, but since Mr. and Mrs. McMahn were her official guardians, the final decision must rest

with them.

The letter was sealed and posted, and there followed anxious days of waiting. Jean soon made friends with the family next door, and joined the Tuesday Bible class in their house.

Although very serious for her age, she was full of fun, too. “We had a maid who lived in, and a cook, at Court House,” she said with a twinkle, as she helped Mrs. Deacon to wash the dishes one morning.

“Well, there’s no maid here, my lass—and you’ll be expected to keep that bedroom of yours clean and tidy,” laughed her grandmother.

“Oh, I know! I like doing it. You know, I hated being waited on. Mummy always let me help—it gave me a ‘belonging’ feeling. I never really felt I belonged at Court House.”

Just then, the mail-van drew up, and Jean rushed to the door. “It’s from Scotland,” she called, taking the letter from the postman. “Oh, do hurry up and read it!”

She waited impatiently, looking at Mrs. Deacon’s face as she read. “It’s all right, Jean. You can stay. They’re afraid they’ll never make a lady of you,” she said.

Jean chuckled.

“Do they really say that?” she asked.

“Well, more or less!”

Mr. and Mrs. McMahn had realised for some time that their grand-daughter would never fit into their way of life; and they certainly had no intention of changing that. They realised that their plans to bring her up in their own way had miscarried, and as she grew older, the difficulties would increase, so they were not altogether sorry to agree that in future the child should live with her mother’s parents.

Jean rushed round to tell Mrs. Jones the good news; while Mrs. Deacon offered up a silent prayer of thanks.

That evening, Mrs. Deacon went to bed early with a headache. Jean, after clearing away the supper things, sat down to do her Bible Readings with her Grandfather.

“Grandad,” she said suddenly, “How soon can I be baptised?.”

Mr. Deacon looked startled. Although, in the week she had been with them, he realised that Jean’s friend Sarah had done her work well, and Jean had a sound knowledge of Bible teaching, he wasn’t prepared for such a sudden request.

He thought for a moment. Jean was very young. But if she really understood what she was doing, no-one could stand in her way.

“If you really understand and believe the things Sarah has taught you, just as soon as your name has been given to the meeting, and an interview has been arranged.”

“I do really believe,” Jean answered earnestly. “But why must I have an interview? It’s not like applying for a job. Sarah had one, and I couldn’t see why. After all, she’d been to the Sunday School since she was five—they surely knew she understood.”

“Find 2 Corinthians 6 in your Bible, Jean, and read the last two verses to me,” Mr. Deacon said.

Jean found the place, and read, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. And I will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

“Right!” said her grandfather, “When anyone is baptised into Christ, they become sons or daughters of the Lord God Himself, and brother or sister of everyone else who has joined God’s family. Jesus was God’s son by birth; we are sons and daughters by adoption, as it were. Now read Romans 8:14-17.”

Jean read, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” “The call of Christ is to be a son or daughter of God. It’s a very high calling, and it brings a grave responsibility—a responsibility no-one can under-take lightly, without counting the cost.”

“Yes, I see that,” nodded Jean.

“So the ecclesia has to make sure that any member who joins them really understands what she is doing. And to understand, you must have a sound knowledge of first principles.”

“What are those?”

“Why, the most important beliefs which we share—our belief about the resurrection, and the second coming of Christ, and the setting up of the Kingdom of God on earth, and so on.”

Jean looked thoughtful.

After a moment or two, she said, “I still want to be baptised. Will you arrange an interview for me?”

“There’s just one other thing, Jean. Are you quite sure you’re not doing this just because it would have pleased your mother and father?”

“No, Grandad, truly. Of course, I know they would have wished it. But I really have thought it out for myself. If Mrs. McMahn were my mother, instead of my grandmother, I would have wanted it just the same. Like my Daddy,” she added.

Mr. Deacon was very moved by Jean's decision— but he wasn't a man to show his feelings, so he just said, "I'll make arrangements for the interview. Now let's get on with the readings."



8. REJOICING IN THE ECCLESIA

Strangely enough, while Jean was asking her Grandfather about being baptised, a similar discussion was going on in the sitting-room of the house next door.

“I don’t want to wait any longer,” said Mrs. Jones. “I want to be baptised.”

“But are we really ready?” asked Bob. “Mr. Deacon’s talks have only made me realise how much I DON’T know.”

“Me, too. But Mrs. Deacon says that baptism is only a beginning. You can go on learning all your life.”

“That’s true,” agreed her husband.

“I’ve been thinking,” she went on. “I could manage the Sunday dinner quite well, if I prepared everything beforehand. We could all go in on Sunday mornings, and Peter and Anne could go to Sunday School. They have it in the mornings. We really ought to send them.”

“Yes, I had thought of that,” replied Bob. Then, after a bit, he asked.

“Shall I write for both of us?” Mary thought for a bit.

“No,” she said. “It’s such an individual matter. I think we’d each better write for ourselves, Bob.”

“Well, yes, perhaps you’re right,” he agreed.

So it happened that, one morning early in September, Mr. Brown, the Recording Brother (or secretary, as you might say) of the meeting in Oxbridge received three letters asking for baptism.

The following week interviews were arranged, and Jean, Mary and Bob each proved that they had a sound understanding of the great truths taught in the Bible.

Then came the day for the baptisms. Never before in the history of Oxbridge meeting had there been such a thing as a triple baptism; it was an occasion of great rejoicing. And to no-one did it bring more happiness than to Mrs. Deacon, as she stood there watching.

Jean was the first to be immersed.

Mr. Deacon, being responsible for the actual immersion, asked her, “Jean McMahn, do you believe the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ?”

“I do,” she answered.

“Then on this your public confession of faith, you are baptised in the name of the

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the remission of your sins.”

“How thankful her father and mother would have been,” sighed Mrs. Deacon. “But they will know, in the day of resurrection.”

After Jean came Mary, and then Bob.

Mrs. Deacon was very moved.

“This is only a beginning for them all,” she thought. “They’re bound to meet all kinds of difficulties and sorrows. The words of Paul are true enough—it is through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom of God. May God bless them, and bring them safely to His kingdom.”

They were singing the last hymn now. She joined in with all her heart.

With Christ we share a mystic grave,
With Christ we buried lie.
But ‘tis not in the darksome cave
By mournful Calvary.
The pure and bright baptismal flood
Entombs our nature’s stain:
New creatures from the cleansing wave
With Christ we rise again.
Thrice blest if through this world of strife,
And sin and selfish care,
Our snow-white robe of righteousness
We undefiled wear.
Thrice blest if from the sleep of death,
All glorious and free,
We to thy heavenly kingdom pass,
O risen Lord, with Thee.

Eileen Ashman



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