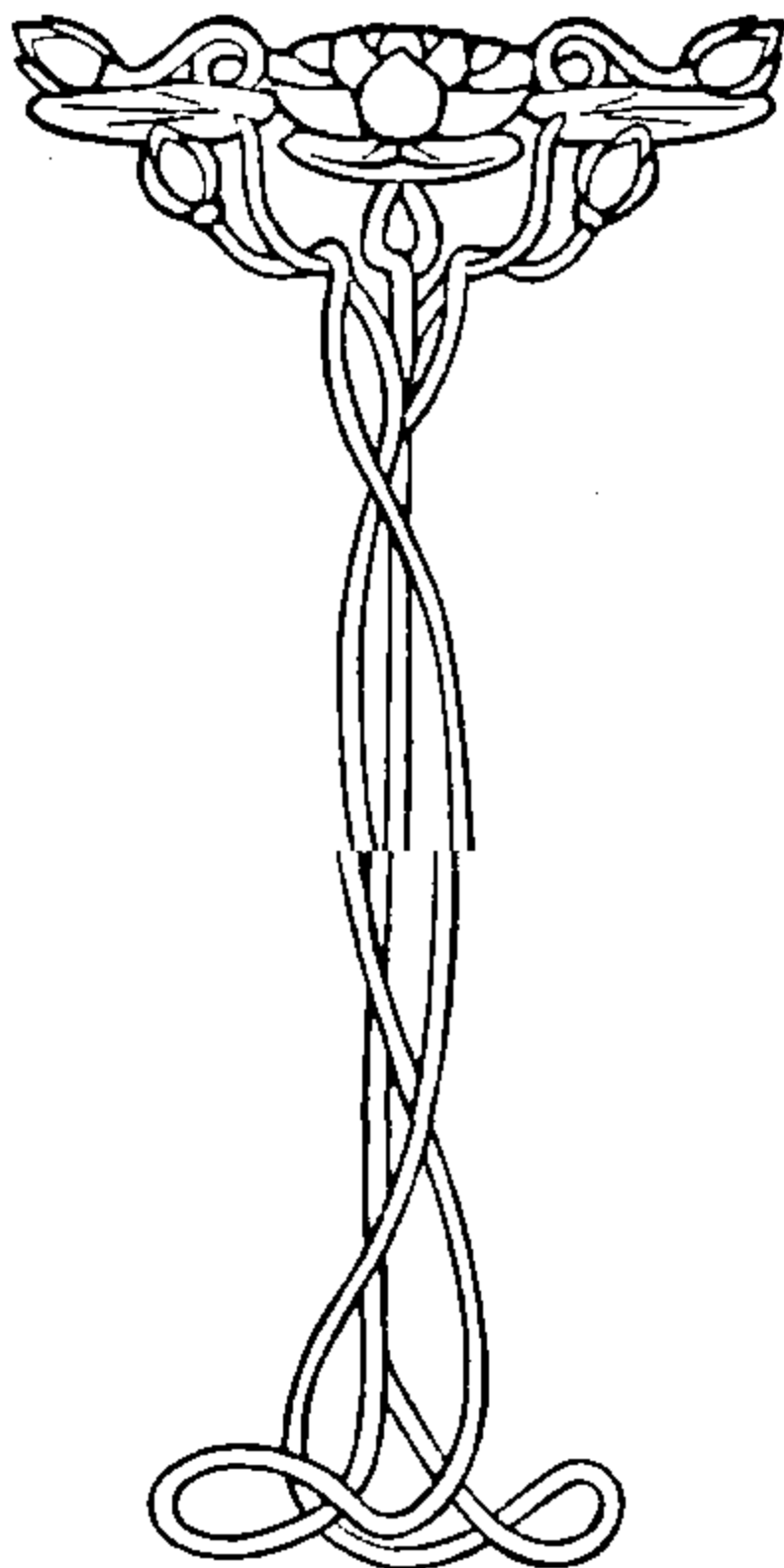


THE TRAMP

WHO BECAME A DEACON

By H. A. IRONSIDE



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THE TRAMP WHO BECAME A DEACON;
AND HOW HE FOUND PEACE WITH GOD.

ARAGGED, travel-stained and hungry-looking tramp was idly shambling along one of the principal streets of the thriving city of Louisville, Kentucky, some few years ago, furtively eyeing the passers-by, as though wondering who would be most likely to respond to a touching plea of ill-luck and various hardships, when suddenly a police officer touched him on the shoulder.

“Look here,” he said, “you’re not fit to be seen on the streets of this place. I’ll give you just forty minutes to get out of town, and if you’re found in the city limits after that time, I’ll run you in for sixty days.”

The tramp hastily beat a retreat and started for the railroad. He would not have minded thirty days in jail. In fact it would have really been in the nature of an accommodation, and would have rather pleased him, for when let out again the present cold weather would have probably passed away, and he would have food and rest at least in the interim. He had plenty of the latter as it was, but the former had been exceedingly difficult to obtain of late, for beyond occasional scraps of bread dropped by the train hands along the track, and dried corn found in the fields, he had tasted nothing for several days.

A month in jail would certainly be preferable to spending the same length of time in his present half-starved condition. In fact, even two months, long as it seemed, he finally concluded would be better than to go as hungry as he had recently; so, suddenly deciding to accept the hospitality of the city, he turned right-

about and began retracing his steps, looking for the officer who had threatened his arrest. He got back to the corner from whence he had been ordered away, but no policeman was in sight. He roamed where he would according to his own will, and still no officer appeared.

He began to despair of any present relief. No one would part with their means to assist him, and he could not even run across a policeman who would arrest him. He was turning disconsolately away and heading for the railroad again when a kindly-visaged individual, evidently noting his forlorn appearance, stopped as he passed him, and dropped a five-cent piece into his hand. The surprised and gratified vagrant mumbled some unheard words of thankfulness as the gentleman passed on, and then hastened off to a nearby store where he invested in some crackers, thinking he would get of these the largest amount. Ordinarily the drinking saloon would have claimed him, but on this occasion he decided that hunger should have the first place; thirst would be attended to next time. Eagerly grasping his purchase he hastened off to an out-of-the-way place to satisfy the cravings of his appetite.

Ensnconced on a pile of railway ties, he was munching his dry meal when the door of a cottage across the street opened, and a little girl, a bright-faced, cheery child of perhaps eight summers, stepped out and came straight over to where he sat, bearing in her dainty hands a cup of steaming hot coffee.

“Here, poor man,” she said, “my mama sent this to you because it’s so cold and she saw you eating your supper without anything warm to drink. She didn’t put any cream in it, for she thought perhaps you mightn’t like it, but if you do, I’ll run and get you some.”

With that the little miss handed the refreshing cup to the wretched young man on the ties, who, long unused to such kindness, was too astonished for the moment to utter even a word of thanks, but took it from her hands in silence. When he returned the cup to the house, and did essay to speak, his feelings quite overcame him, and bursting into tears he thanked the mother for her kindness to one so worthless.

As the tears rolled down his rough cheeks, she faltered some words of comfort, but he turned hastily from the door, and started down the road anxious to be alone with his own thoughts.

And *think*, he did. That little act of thoughtful kindness, those sympathetic words, had touched a hidden spring in the heart of the wanderer that seemed to set all the wheels of memory, long clogged, in motion. It is true he was only a tramp, and as such considered to be feelingless, and possibly soulless, by the most of the people whom he encountered. But he was a man for all that, and for his soul, as for all others, Christ had died. Dirty and dissolute as he was, the God of all grace, who declares that "there is no difference" in that all alike have sinned and come short of the glory of God, was looking upon him in compassion and love, and had followed him through all his tangled pathway. He had not always been in the plight we have seen him in. Born on a little farm in the state of Pennsylvania, the child of honest, hard-working parents, it had doubtless never entered his mother's mind, as night after night she tucked her baby boy away in his bed, that some day her darling would be a homeless wanderer, a slave to drink and kindred vices, spurned by the self-righteous, hunted by the officers of the law, and a stranger generally to

affection, comfort and purity. Yet so it was. As he left childhood behind, he grew up without God, and when at an early age he had to go out to work he soon fell in with evil companions who introduced him to the "pleasures of sin" in forms he had known nothing of in the quiet home of his earliest days, so that he became quite accustomed to the taste of tobacco and strong drink while yet in his teens, and was often drunk before he was twenty.

He was not yet at that age when he left the more prosaic East for the wilder West, though at that time getting no farther than the state of Illinois, where he worked for a short period; then after a brief visit home turned his steps towards Ohio. For a few months he worked on a new railroad but this put him in company with men of the hardest character, who readily helped to mold him in the same way. He was an apt pupil, and had not quite attained to his majority when he gave up his job and, deciding that begging was more congenial than working, set out to see the world at the expense of any who would be prevailed upon to help him.

The particular part of the world to which he turned was that portion known to Americans as "The south." The chains of an almost uncontrollable appetite now held him tightly. Liquor he would and must have. Food was rather an after consideration. For some years he roamed through the country, tramping and "beating his way" through seven states. Seldom did thoughts of ETERNITY press on his spirit. Never perhaps did he calmly weigh his condition as a poor sinner hastening on to meet a holy God. These things had occupied him to no great extent when at home. They were even less to him now. Yet that forgotten

One, so grievously sinned against, was very gracious to him, again and again saving him from death and —what must have followed—an ETERNAL HELL, when circumstances seemed to have combined to destroy him. On one occasion he and a companion had stolen a ride on the "Panhandle Road," going from Pittsburgh to Columbus. They were riding on the bumpers between two cars. Rain began to fall, accompanied by heavy crashes of thunder and lurid lightning. He proposed to his partner to seek shelter in the cattle-car behind them. Crawling around on the edge of it they crept through an open side door. The next instant there was a tremendous crash. A rear-end collision had taken place in the darkness. Terrified, the tramps jumped from their hiding-place. They found that the end of the box-car in front had been thrown out against the car into which they had crept. Had they not changed just when they did, certain death must have been their portion. The train men were cursing and swearing. He of whom I write turned away shocked at profanity at such a time. He felt instinctively that he owed his life to the God who was being blasphemed, and for a time his conscience was somewhat aroused; but, the danger over, its voice was unheeded. On other occasions not necessary to mention here he experienced the preserving grace of God, who in this sense is "the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. iv. 10).

Once in those years of dissipation and godlessness he wrote home to let his parents, who had mourned him as dead, know of his whereabouts. And dead he was, not actually as men speak, but morally so; "dead in trespasses and sins," for he was "without hope and without God in the world." See Eph. ii.

But the God who had given His Son to die for such as he, had set His heart upon him, and the day was approaching when his very condition was to be the means of his awakening. For some little time previous to the incident first mentioned, he had been proving in a manner more bitter than ordinarily that "the way of the transgressor is hard." A few months prior to that he had turned from his aimless life for several weeks and gone to work, but toil he had become unaccustomed to, and giving it up, he took his wages and went up the Mississippi river from Bollivar to Memphis. On the third and last night of the trip, while sleeping on deck beneath the boilers he was chloroformed and robbed by the colored roustabouts. Upon regaining consciousness he found his pockets cut open from the outside and all his earnings gone, save a few odd cents which the thieves had overlooked.

From this time on he experienced hardship after hardship. It was God's way of bringing him to himself. In no other way perhaps could he be broken down. At times he would think of turning over a new leaf, and giving up his bad habits, but with no thought of what was due to God,—simply for his own betterment. On the night referred to above, however, when the ingenuous kindness of the mother and the little girl was shown him, a new thought came to his mind. These people had been good to him when he deserved nothing. Who made them so? Could it be God? It surely must have been, else why would they have cared about him? And how had he treated this most blasphemed and yet indulgent God? Alas, the past years of neglect, of transgression, of forgetfulness, what a tale did they tell of mercy slighted and of grace despised!

It was not yet the gospel—God giving His Son to die for lost, guilty sinners—that had spoken to him. Long weary months, even years, were to go by ere his soul rested on this. But the ordinary mercies, the dispensations of Providence, the every-day evidences of divine care, these were the things that were used to convict this wretched drinking tramp of his terrible wickedness in spurning a God who could be so gracious to those so undeserving, and who makes His sun to shine and His rain to fall on just and unjust alike. The more he reflected on this, the more he felt a sense of sin crushing him. He loathed himself as he thought of his wretchedness and degradation. He alone was to blame, for it might have been so different. Like an earlier prodigal he said, “How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.” Temporally and spiritually he had not gained, but lost by his wayward career, and if in *time*, he had found life so hard, what of ETERNITY? He had “run with the footmen,” and they had wearied him; “contend with horses” he could not. In the land of peace, this world, in which he hoped to find his fill of pleasure and folly, he had become wearied and sick of all that Satan had used to allure him on. How would he do “in the *swellings of Jordan?*” Ah, there was something terrible in the thought of some day having to leave the shores of Time behind him, to buffet with and be buffeted by the icy billows of death, sweeping him on to ETERNITY! God *must* be faced. His own evil record must be met, and, without a Bible to tell him so, he knew that an *eternal hell* awaited such as he.

He went on from Louisville to a town in Ohio. Here he grew so miserable that he made up his mind that

something must be done. He was going on to judgment. He must call a halt, and seek to put matters right with the God he had sinned against so long. He gave up his vagabondish life and went to work. His craving for liquor he sought to conquer. He fought hard to be free, and in some measure succeeded. He tried to do right to atone for the past, and hoped God would be merciful; but he was in agony of mind still. At last he decided to see a minister, in order to learn how he might put away his sins. He sought out a clergyman. A very good and sincere person he was, no doubt, but evidently blind to the need of a soul and ignorant of the gospel of God. Ushered into his presence, the erstwhile tramp broke out with, "I'm lost, and I want to be saved. For a year I've been in anguish. I cannot sleep. If I die as I am, I'll have an awful eternity. Can you tell me what I must do?"

The minister was interested and really anxious to help. As a first step he advised him to join a class in the Sunday-school and learn the Scriptures. He did as he was told. He became a regular attendant, and for a time conscience was lulled to rest, but true peace with God he knew not. When the minister thought he was ready for it, he was told to learn the catechism and thus be prepared to join the church. He had a bad memory, but he pored over his task. For six months he went to the lectures on it. He managed to memorize most of the ten commandments at last, the minister telling him God would be satisfied if he learned as much of it as he could. But this gave him no peace, for what comfort could the law which is the "ministry of condemnation" (2 Cor. iii. 9), and "the strength of sin" (1 Cor. xv. 56), minister to a man already groaning beneath the weight of the very sin

that the commandment only made "exceeding sinful" (Rom. vii. 13)? Willing to do all he was told, he was baptized and joined the church, and then took the sacrament as a further means of grace; but still he was without peace. He joined the "Christian Endeavor Society" also, and sought to be faithful in the discharge of all his religious duties. For over a year this was kept up, on one occasion traveling forty miles to be present on sacramental Sunday to partake of the bread and wine, that told of a crucified Christ, as yet unrevealed to his soul.

I do not mean to say that there had been no change in his outward life. There had been a most marked one. He gave his employers faithful service, mastered bit by bit the appetite that had well-nigh ruined him body and soul, kept company only with people of high moral character, in place of the dissolute companions of former days, and was outwardly a very different man to what he had been. Alas! it was yet *outside* work with him. Inwardly he was still ignorant of the grace of God, even as when ordered off the streets of Louisville as disgraceful to himself and dangerous to the public peace. He had yet to learn that "Except a man be *born* again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The difference between his past and the then present was this: Before, he had been an immoral sinner, now he was a moral sinner; he had been a cursing, blaspheming sinner, now he was a prayer-saying and hymn-singing sinner. He was once an idle vicious sinner, now he was a hard-working, religious sinner. He had been a sinner in his own proper place—outside the circle of those who were in name at least Christians, now he was a baptized, church-going, sacrament-taking sinner, but still a Christ-ignoring sinner;

or if Christ had any place at all in his thoughts it was at best that of a crutch to a lame man—a mere helper to better himself.

As he had no peace, spite of all his earnestness and punctilious attendance upon the various means of grace he knew of, he again repaired to his minister. It was suggested that possibly he was not devoted enough. Let him give freely of his money to the support of the church, for “the Lord loveth a cheerful giver,” and doubtless blessing would follow. As an added incentive he was made a deacon, and it thus devolved on him to assist in collecting the pastor’s salary. He was now actively employed in church-work, which he took up faithfully, but to peace with God he was still a stranger.

This went on for about a couple of years, when he made a visit to his old home in Pennsylvania. He was walking one evening down the streets of Reading, when he was attracted to a crowd of people gathered about a street preacher. There was a ring of confidence and assurance about this man’s address that our friend, the deacon, (for we can call him the tramp no longer) had not been used to. His theme was God’s love to poor sinners. He dwelt at some length on the grand evidence of it in the giving of His Son to die, “that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The unhappy deacon listened attentively as God’s way of salvation through simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was clearly set forth. “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” “For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. ii. 8), were the words which rang from the preacher’s lips. This was the first gleam of the true light that had so far shone

into his darkened soul. He began to realize that not all his earnestness and religiousness, his liberality and his reformation, nor yet anything that he could add to them, had or could bring him one step nearer salvation. He had not advanced by all his efforts a hair's breadth in all those two weary years. The deacon had been as ignorant of God's salvation even as the tramp. But he was learning that lesson, and it is a great one. They were perhaps far from agreeable truths, but truths they were nevertheless, as the questioning reader can see by referring to the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans.

But if the deacon found out that he could do nothing to save himself he also found out that

"All the doing has been done,
As God has clearly shown
When by the offering of His Son
His purpose He made known."

The result of the preaching, which was listened to for several evenings, was that he *trusted in Christ* and ceased from his own works. Thus the deacon had become a *Christian*. He was still weak, there was much that he did not understand, but one thing he was clear about, viz., that God had loved him enough to give His Son to die for him. Surely then he could trust Him for the rest. With this thought filling his mind he returned to Ohio. He did not yet know the full meaning of "peace with God," but his soul rested on His love as shown in Christ, and more was to follow.

Shortly after his return, an evangelist came to his town to hold "Union meetings." He was cordially received by the various churches, and the services opened with a great deal of enthusiasm and numbers professed to find blessing. It was not long, however,

until a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction set in. Ministers and church-members began to become angry and alarmed, and finally he was turned out of the pulpits, and the "Union meetings" were at an end. The reason is simply given. He preached that all are on one plane *before God*. Men might make distinctions; *He* made none. All are lost and guilty, and so wretched is their plight that they can do nothing to save themselves; that God knew that; in love had sent Christ; Christ had done it all; now, therefore, all who believe in Christ are justified from ALL THINGS, and could *know* it here and now, on the authority of the word of God. This, the same doctrine as the street preacher's, was unpalatable teaching for that highly respectable community, and they would have no more of it.

A number of weary *workers* for salvation however had obeyed the gospel and accepted the invitation to

"Cast your deadly doing down,
Down at Jesus' feet,
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
• Gloriously COMPLETE."

These were not disposed to acquiesce in the summary dismissal of the strange preacher with the unpopular message, so meetings of a more private nature were held in various homes.

The deacon attended these regularly, and, having rested in the cross for pardon before, he now saw that he was not only forgiven, but *fully justified*; the judgment he deserved had been fully borne and ended in the judgment of Christ on the cross; he was now therefore free—cleared of all. Thus he had assurance from the only authority in the case—God's own word.

About this time a little paper postmarked "Boston," but without the name or address of the sender upon it

came to him through the mail. It was a copy of "*The Messenger of Peace*," containing an article entitled "Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment."* From this precious tract he saw that he was not only justified for the present, but eternally saved, for he had eternal life. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John x. 28). Now his cup of joy was full. Cloudless peace with God was his; he could say:

"That which can shake the Cross
Can shake the peace it gave,
Which tells me Christ has never died
Nor ever left the grave."

He gave up his diaconate shortly after, realizing that what he now possessed was not in sympathy with his surroundings. He subsequently returned to Reading intending to go on to New York, with the purpose of uniting with a society there of which he heard. It was represented as being both Pentecostal and Apostolic; its leaders were said to be men of marvelous faith and personal holiness, who could heal the sick and perform various other wonders.

But God had something better than this for him, for in Reading he once more found upon the streets the man who had before told him of God's love and grace. He gladly heard him again, attending indoor and outdoor meetings for some weeks. In this time he made a further wonderful discovery. He found he was not only a justified man, the possessor of eternal life, but he was, from the moment he believed the gospel, *a member of the only church he could find any thing about*

* This exceedingly helpful paper, which has been blessed to thousands, can be procured by sending a four-cent stamp to Loizeaux Brothers.

in Scripture, called in Eph. i. "The church which is his body" of which the Lord Jesus is the one Head. He learned that upon believing the gospel he had received the Holy Spirit, and had thereby been made a member of this church, "for by one Spirit *are* ye all baptized into one body." (See 1 Cor. xii.) He at once saw the incongruity of joining anything, inasmuch as he was already a member of the church of God. He therefore relinquished the idea of going to New York.

From this time on, the word of God became his daily companion and his constant study. He saw from it the divine simplicity of gathering to the precious Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, in the confession of his membership in the body of Christ in common with all true Christians, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20).

For a number of years now he has enjoyed meeting in godly simplicity, and yet also godly order, with others similarly gathered—assembling on the first day of the week, not now to take the sacrament as a means of grace, but to partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him to whom he owes everything for time and eternity.

He was persuaded to let this account of his godless life, his efforts for salvation, and the way he found peace with God, be sent forth, in the hope that some other weary prodigal or self-righteous soul might be led to trust in Christ Jesus, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." If the Lord so use it, it will have fulfilled its one end and object.

H. A. I.