

H. ROBB FRENCH

Pioneer, Prophet, and Prayer Warrior

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CONTENTS (39 of 103 pages selected)

Prologue

1 The Lawyer and the Preacher

2 In Balaam's Footsteps

3 A Hiding Place

4 Through the Storm

5 Pioneering in Alabama

6 A Deed of Kindness

7 Street Meetings

8 The Power of God

9 Mother Trusler

10 Preaching in the West

11 Revival at Birmingham

12 Conquering Pike's Peak

13 On Spiritual Tiptoes

14 The Darkest Hour and the Brightest

15 A Visit to the Holy Land

16 Deception

17 The True and the False

18 Keeping Ready for the Rapture

19 Soul Travail

20 Hobe Sound

21 God of Storms

22 Sunset and Sunrise

Supplement

Quotes from H. Robb French

Back Cover

Prologue

Rufus Alfonzo French, affectionately known and referred to in this book as Father French, was born in a log cabin near Medina, Ohio, August 25, 1852. His parents were very poor and at an early age he worked for neighboring farmers in order that he might help to "keep the wolf from the door."

He told about husking corn during the bitter cold days, beating his hands together, and stamping his feet vigorously to keep them from freezing. When he came in for meals he kept away from the stove lest he would suffer more from the cold when he returned to the field.

As Rufus grew older, his father gave him a small allowance from his wages. He saved this money until he was able to purchase a cook stove for his mother, which made it considerably more convenient for her than cooking over the open fireplace.

One day Rufus was hurriedly summoned to go to the cabin if he wished to see his mother alive. She pushed her emaciated hand from under the covers and took her son's hand in hers. She told him that he had been a good boy and thanked him for being so kind to her. Soon after, she breathed her last.

As the boy walked out of the lonely cabin that night and looked up at the heavens, the tragic thought pierced his heart, You will never have another mother. Go where you will, you will have friends, but no one will take the place of Mother.

Being industrious and frugal, young French succeeded in accumulating a small amount of property. Friends advised him to go West, so he moved to Lawrence, Kansas. His associates, recognizing his ability, urged him to attend the law school of the State University located in Lawrence, which he did. After graduating and being admitted to the bar, he joined with Judge Barker in establishing a law firm. Anxious to follow the westward trek, Father French went to Durango, Colorado, to open another law office. Durango is in the heart of the Rockies and at that time was a rough mining town. Lynch law was rather looked upon as the law of the country.

Mother French (Rebecca Elenor Cowdy) was born near Portadown, Ireland, May, 1854. Her father farmed, ran a small dairy, and bought and sold linen goods. They were very poor and lived in a typical Irish farmhouse with thatched roof and dirt floor. They did not have much spiritual light although her father was a Methodist class leader and her mother a praying woman. The children tell how they listened at the door as she prayed, "O Lord, heaven would not be heaven to me if one of my children is lost." However mistaken she may have been, it showed her intense earnestness. A terrible scourge of fever swept through that section of Ireland. Her father and mother died within a week of each other and, it is said, were buried in the same grave.

When Robb and Geraldine visited Ireland they sought out the little home in which the children were born and were anxious to find the grave in which Mother French's parents were buried. The cemetery is in the beautiful Kilmore churchyard. It was easy for Robb and Geraldine to visualize the funeral procession coming down the narrow lane to lay in the grave all that seemed dear to those eight orphan children. They thought of the prayers which that devout mother had stored up in the golden vials. It was said by those who watched those orphans that anyone who wronged them in any way suffered divine punishment.

The children all came to the United States in due time. Rebecca and her sister, Fannie, milliners by trade, went to Durango, Colorado, to open a store in that growing western town.

Rufus and Rebecca (Father and Mother French) were married, and Rufus took his bride back to Lawrence, Kansas, where he again began the practice of law. For two terms Father was elected county attorney. During his term of office he brought an injunction against a brewery in Lawrence and confiscated the property. The case was carried to the United States Supreme Court and won by Father. The Frenches bought forty acres near Lawrence and built a beautiful suburban home. Three children were born here George, William, and a daughter Frances. On December 26, 1891, while Father was again practicing law for a short time in Denver and the family were living there, Hamilton Robb was born.

Back once more in the lovely home in Lawrence, Mother was not satisfied. A nice home and the success of her husband were not enough. Her heart was thirsting after the One who said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." Not content to worship in the fashionable church, she found her way down to the humble little Salvation Army Hall. The Salvation Army was severely persecuted in those days. They were often stoned and thrown into prison. As Mother sat in that little hall and looked at the plain lads and lassies whose faces beamed with inward joy, she realized it was not silks and satins, jewelry and fine homes that she wanted. It was Christ. She said later that the young man speaking seemed to assume the visage of Christ, with a halo around his head as he preached the Word. She went forward to the penitent form and was gloriously converted. She soon stripped off her jewelry and arranged her hair in its natural plainness and beauty.

Father had not yet been converted though he was superintendent of the Sunday school and held several other important offices in the North Lawrence Methodist Church. Mother French was praying earnestly for his conversion when Father was sent to Denver, Colorado, to bring suit against a certain company. Before he left, Mother insisted that he go to Brother Peck's mission at least once while in Denver. The story of his conversion is told in detail in the book proper.

Upon Father's return home, a true revival soon began among the members of the North Lawrence Methodist Church. Father began to witness to the experience of sanctification; hungry hearts began to respond. Cottage prayer meetings were in progress where numbers were saved and sanctified.

With beaming faces, they testified to having received the sanctifying baptism of the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, severe opposition developed. Soon, the class meetings, which always followed the preaching services, were no longer allowed. Some leaders saw to it that no second blessing songs were sung in the church. Eventually, Father and some forty others were forced to leave the Methodist Church.

It was a heartbreaking and exceedingly trying experience. The severing of existing ties and close friendships of many happy years was not at all easy. But two forces impelled the little group to leave.

First, the opposition calculated to drive them from the congregation made it well nigh impossible to stay and be true to their God-given convictions. Second, to remain in the bosom of an apostatizing church would eternally jeopardize their own souls and the souls of their children. Robb has remarked that he will never cease to praise the Lord that his parents led him out of that church. He says, "I fear most of the older people lost out, and their children have long ago denied the faith."

Father, Mother, and the children found a little group of people of like faith and joined with them in worship. Soon after, Father was asked to serve as their pastor. This was a real proof of Father's consecration, for now he left his lucrative practice of law. During the time he served as shepherd of this little flock, it was organized into a Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Kansas Conference.

Sometime later, Judge Barker came to Father and asked him to join him in a lawsuit soon to come up. "You are especially adapted to the work," the judge argued, "and, besides, you will get a good share of the money.

Father agreed to the proposition, but Mother remonstrated. "You know how you always loved the practice of law, and I believe this is a scheme of the enemy to lure you back into the law business."

"Nonsense," said Father, "I intend to take only this one case. Besides, I need the cash it will

bring."

But Mother was troubled. She asked Grandma French, Father's step-mother, to join her in praying that the Lord would make Father too sick to work on the case. The whole thing turned out just that way. Father was too sick to go on with the suit, and that ended the law business for him forever.

Chapter 1

The Lawyer and the Preacher

In the summer of 1897 a homemade prairie schooner drawn by two horses crept along a rough Kansas wagon trail. Father had fashioned the schooner with his own hands, put the bows on the old lumber wagon, and spread the canvas over them. Pots and pans, skillets and buckets dangled from the sides of the wagon and swung from their hooks at its back.

Such of the family's possessions as would be needed on the trip -- dishes, blankets, clothes -- were stuffed inside the vehicle. Between, under, or upon them, two boys and a sister clung, while on the seat out front, at least in nice weather, Father and Mother sat.

Good old Rover -- faithful companion, almost like one of the family, loped along with Father when he walked by the horses' heads. He capered with the children when they spilled out of the wagon to stretch their legs and play. At times, to break up the boredom of the day, he would dash off into the woods, almost improperly (considering his usual seemly decorum), to chase some real or imaginary object, returning to the wagon unabashed that he had brought nothing back to show for his vagabondism. When the wagon stopped, he lay under it, sphinx-like, as its protector, or indulged in a well-earned nap.

On and on the wagon creaked, now bumping over an uneven track as hard as stones, now dragging through mud almost up to its axles. One of the horses pulling the wagon was a strong, faithful, dependable mare named Kit. It had been impossible to find a horse that would team with her satisfactorily, but Kit forged ahead, pulling not only the load, but sometimes the lazy horse, too. Up and down the steep hills she traveled to carry her master's family to their destination. Father, children, and sometimes Mother, walked up the little hills and often helped Kit by pushing the wagon.

Though the journey had its adventure, there were monotonous times also times when bodies grew weary of the thumping and bumping, and bones rebelled against the jostling. No doubt minds went back to the spacious, well-furnished home the family had left behind in Lawrence, Kansas. No murmuring word escaped the lips of the occupants of the wagon, however. Instead, if one listened closely, he could hear above the din and the clatter, the sweet notes of a song lisped by the youngest of the group.

"A tent or a cottage, sang the wee lad of five,
"A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
They're building a palace for me over there.

It was little Robb. He knew what he was singing, and he meant every word of it. Were they not taking this long, long ride for a grand and splendid purpose? He was thrilled to the heart with every mile. Even when they came to meal time and there was no meat to eat? Was he thrilled then? Yes, even then! For when that happened, as it often did, Father and Mother French and all the children would kneel together and ask their Heavenly Father to supply their need. How exciting it was, then, to see God answer, sometimes in very ordinary ways, such as giving Mother wisdom as to how to make what they had go farther and still taste good. It seemed to the child that she would get the skillet, put it on the fire and stir something, and they would have a good supper. At other times God would answer miraculously, sending food to the very fire they had built by faith to cook the supper.

One night Father, Mother, and the youngsters, tired and hungry, gathered round the campfire.

Father had tramped most of the day, leading the horses. The boys had alternately ridden and walked. Out in the wind and the weather, parents and children alike developed monstrous appetites. But there was very little to eat except bread. That night they sat around the campfire, waiting for God to answer prayer.

Old Rover had wandered off on one of his vagaries, no one having missed him. Now, through the growing darkness of the night, they could see him trotting down the road pulling something.

Evidently the object he dragged was heavy. He pulled along, then stopped and rested, panting. Again, he pulled awhile and panted. Finally, he pulled the thing right into the campfire circle where the family had gathered, then went and lay down, his work finished.

Probably an old bone, everyone thought.

But no, it looked different. Father bent down to see. The children grouped around, and lo, it was a huge piece of dried beef as big as a ham! Dried beef! Who would have believed it! What a treat! Wrapped in burlap, it had been protected from the ground over which it had been dragged. And good old Rover had been so mannerly that he had pulled it along by the string and had not even touched the meat with his teeth.

That piece of meat was so delicious the French family never forgot it. It supplied not only one, but several meals, providing some of the best eating they had ever had. It needed no dressing or salt to doctor it up. It was already flavored. It reminded them of the way Elijah was fed by the brook. And they were sure that when they got to heaven and heard Elijah telling about the ravens feeding him, they would want to tell how a dog brought meat to them.

This is what Father had come to after giving up the lucrative practice of law, after giving up his beautiful, well-furnished home and his bank account. What had made him do it?

It was a long story which started way back with little Miss MacAfee down in Kentucky, a tollgate keeper full of the Spirit of God. People would fuss and quarrel at her as she collected the toll, but never a bitter word escaped her lips. She kept as sweet as though they had smiled at her and given her friendly words. The news of her heavenly spirit spread. People talked about it, marveled at it.

Finally a reporter from the Louisville Courier heard of the sanctified tollgate keeper and went out to interview her.

"Yes," she told him, "I gave my heart to God, and He's kept me converted ever since. After He

converted me, I gave myself to Him, just abandoned everything to Him, and He cleansed my heart and sanctified me wholly!"

The reporter went back to his office, chuckling to himself. He would have a good time writing this up to make people laugh. He wrote it in burlesque, and the paper gave it front-page prominence with glaring headlines. Folk did laugh, some of them, but there was more to the story. A copy of the paper drifted down into Mississippi and into the hands of a Mr. Hopper, hungry for something he did not know how to obtain. He read about Miss MacAfee and was convinced she had what he wanted.

"Wife," he exclaimed, "I'm going up to see her!"

The next train found him on his way. It was not long until the little tollgate keeper was praying with Mr. Hopper, exhorting him, quoting the promises to him. God met the hunger of his heart and sanctified him wholly.

When he returned to Mississippi, he started preaching holiness, and, as he did so, Dr. Carradine, pastor of the largest church in southern Methodism, but dissatisfied with his own spiritual condition, came under Mr. Hopper's influence. Soon he too rejoiced in sanctification of heart.

According to his own testimony, Dr. Carradine had been ordained after having answered in the affirmative the questions, "Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? Are you groaning after it?" "I did groan after it until I got it," he later said laconically. "Then they made me groan because I had it. They turned the fire on me." He was obligated to locate and go out into evangelistic work.

Dr. Carradine's travels once took him as far as Colorado, into a little mission hall in Denver. In the providence of God it so happened that when Dr. Carradine was in Denver, Father was there too, six hundred miles from home, bringing a lawsuit against a company. He would get big money out of the suit, and that was what Father lived for then.

Mother had prayed earnestly for Father's conversion at this time, and before he left on this trip, she insisted that he go to Rev. Peck's mission at least once while he was in Denver. On Sunday evening he was on his way to hear Dr. Robert McIntyre, one of the great orators of the Methodist Church. He decided to go by the mission and listen to the singing. Then he would hurry on to the First Church.

Father was not interested in missions. He was a member of a big church, superintendent of the Sunday school, and a pioneer in the prohibition movement. He had even closed the brewery of the county in which he was county attorney. He confiscated the property and carried the case to the Supreme Court of the United States, winning the case in the interest of prohibition. It was the first case of its kind in the country.

Father had many good qualities, but still he was a proud man, and missions were farthest from his concern. Now, merely because Mother requested it, and because he did enjoy good music, Father stole into the mission, expecting to step out as soon as the singing was over. Then, Dr. Carradine rose to preach. Something about this man, his countenance, his bearing, caught Father's interest. He thought to himself, "I believe I'll stay just a few minutes longer and see what he's going to talk about." And so he did.

Dr. Carradine began to preach full salvation. This was something Father had always fought. But as the preacher went on and unfolded Bible truth, Father felt that he had never heard the Bible preached before. He saw himself a sinner and a blinded holiness fighter, without God and without hope.

"What a fool I've been!" Father said to himself. "Why couldn't I see that before? Why, it's plain as can be. It's in the Book, Old Testament and New."

Forgetting the humble surroundings of the little mission, the First Church at home with its eloquent preacher, the lawsuit, and the neat little sum which he had hoped would soon fall into his lap, father went to the altar and was converted. Then he went to the altar, seeking to be sanctified.

Now the Lord showed him that he was wrapped up in his business. He enjoyed the practice of law and he was making money -- big money. Covetousness that had always been his trait, and he did not deny it. He knew he was one of the most covetous men on the face of the earth. He was jealous of every banker on Wall Street. He did not want the Fords, the Rockefellers or the J. P. Morgans to have a penny.

"I'll never be satisfied," he had said once, "until I can fence in the whole world and own it."

Kneeling at the altar, Father knew that God was telling him he would have to close up his office and go and preach the Gospel. Preach the Gospel! Father had always felt a preacher was a fool. In college he had told some ministerial students, "You fellows are fools! Why, you'll starve to death!"

And now God was calling him to be one of them!

Father could see an awful dark picture. He could see his children growing up without being educated. He could see them wearing old cast-off clothing. He could see their toes sticking out of their shoes. It seemed as though Father's heartstrings were tearing to pieces, but he looked up and said "Yes!"

Father stepped out on the promise, but did not have the witness of the infilling of the Holy Ghost as yet. After he had been seeking for five nights, he went down to the train to go home, got on a Pullman coach, and said to the porter, "I've been up five nights. I'm awfully tired. Please make up my berth in a hurry. I want to go to bed."

Father had no more than rolled over on his back until it seemed to him that the roof of the Pullman coach split, and the glory of the Lord rolled in. Down came a billow of holy fire, enveloping him completely and surging through his whole being. All night he rolled and tumbled and shouted.

No doubt the other passengers thought they had a crazy man on board. No matter. Father had seen the Lord. God had taken the remains of sin and covetousness so completely out of his heart that he now lived for another world. He often testified later, "I got sanctified on a train speeding through the country and I have been on the move ever since."

Father went home to straighten up his old life and make restitutions. It took about all he had. He did not have to worry about what Mother would say, though she knew by sad experience what it was to be poor. Mother had been left an orphan when she was but a young girl, having seen her father and mother buried in the same grave, almost at the same time, after an awful scourge of fever had

swept through Ireland. She had gone from pillar to post. Then she had found God. Later, when she had her own family, she had made the consecration to go to the poorhouse if such would make preachers out of her husband and boys. And she meant it. No, Mother would not care if all their worldly goods should disappear. She would shout over it. Father knew this, though he did not know that while he was away, she had walked out on the porch one night, looked up at the stars, and prayed, "Lord, save my husband and send him home a prophet. Give me a sign."

Mother had only a little light as yet, but was as simple as a child in her faith. No sooner had she finished her prayer than a meteor shot across the heavens. "Thank You, Lord," she said, and took that meteor as her sign.

The reunion which took place upon Father's return was a happy one indeed. Father was not only saved and sanctified, but had received a call to preach. Mother was in her glory. Father was reputed to be one of the best hog raisers in Douglas County, Kansas, but now all desire for hogs, fine home, and law, faded out of Father's life.

When Father left the practice of law and started to preach, the family was confronted with many testings of faith. They learned what it meant to be poor. They learned what it meant not to have meat for the table.

One day a fellow preacher and his wife came to dinner. There was no meat in the house and Mother thought it would never do to serve dinner to company with no meat on the table. She had long been in the habit of slipping to the landing of the back stairway to pray during the day. So now she stole in there and prayed, "Oh, Lord, send us meat for dinner." No doubt she reminded the Lord that He must do it quickly, too.

Mother went on preparing what she could for the dinner, not knowing what was going on outside. But about the time she had finished praying, a dog had run through the yard after a rabbit. The children took after the dog and got the rabbit. As if timed by the clock, but rather by divine providence, just then a neighbor came by. He had been fishing in the river near the French home, and gave the children a fish. They ran in and told Mother about the rabbit and the fish. Her face lighted up.

"Hurry, Children, and clean them," she said, "and I will fry them for dinner."

Dinner was quickly prepared, and the preacher and his wife were invited to the table. As soon as the wife saw what was on it, she turned a beaming face to her husband. "Oh, Husband," she said, "we have just what we like. You like rabbit and I like fish." God knows how to furnish just the right menu, Mother thought.

They trusted the Lord for many other things aside from meat. They did not know what it was to go to the medicine closet for a pill when anyone got sick. There was no Vick's salve, no rubbing alcohol, no cough syrup. Neither could they call a doctor, for there was no money. If there had been, they would have had to go many miles to get medical help since they lived so far out in the country.

What did they do? They trusted God. And who would want a more blessed experience than that? It was almost fascinating to get into a tight place, they agreed, just to see how the Lord would get them out.

Not always had it been so, however. Time was when Father and Mother had not yet heard anything about holiness, much less about trusting God. Then once, at a time of urgent need, Mother learned her first lesson. Little Willie, just older than Robb, suffered pitifully from epilepsy. The doctor had done all he could.

"He'll die in one of those spasms," the doctor said. "We can give him medicine. We can relieve the force of the shock, but there's no chance, no hope."

Then Mother remembered a Quaker lady who had come to town and who went around praying with the sick. She did not claim any gift of healing, yet often the ones she prayed for recovered.

"Well," thought Mother, "the doctors have given Willie up. I believe we ought to take him to this lady and let her pray."

So Willie was taken to the lady. She knelt down with him and prayed with him -- as simple a prayer as a Sunday school girl would pray.

Willie was disappointed. He had expected many words to be prayed over him. "The doctors have given me up, he said importantly to himself. "It will take more than that to do me any good!"

The woman got up from her knees and, turning to Mother, she warned, "Now, Mrs. French, throw away all medicine. Trust God. If those spasms come back on him, don't lose faith. Hold steady. Tell him to look to Jesus. Believe God and he will be healed."

It was a timely admonition, for, the next morning early, an awful spasm again seized the boy. Little Robb knew at once what was happening. Willie was going into a convulsion.

Mother rushed across the room. "Willie," she cried, "look to Jesus! Look to Jesus!"

The little fellow caught the words, frantic as he was. He lifted his head and looked up. Instantly, he relaxed. The spasm was gone, and in all the years of his life he never had another.

Now that Father had found the Lord, he was just as consecrated as he had been selfish before. Nothing was too precious to give up to answer the call of God to preach the Gospel. Father and Mother dedicated their nice home to the Lord. They first offered it to the conference for a Bible school. But the conference did not feel able at this time to open a school, so it was turned into a rescue home for girls.

Later, Father went up to conference, not caring whether they gave him a church or not. If they didn't, he himself would find a place where he could preach.

"French," they said, "what do you want?"

"Oh, I'm just waiting to see if there's something left over. If there is, I'll take it."

Usually a hard scrabble circuit was left over, and so there was now. Soon after Father returned from conference, Robb found him working on the light lumber wagon.

"What are you doing, Father?" Robb asked.

"We're leaving home, Son, and going out across the country to preach the Gospel," he answered. Robb told the other children, and from then on they lived in an unreal world, alternately excited with the prospect of adventure and wonder promised by a prairie schooner trip, alternately sad with the thought of leaving the only home they remembered their lovely, beautiful home.

Their home was a part of their very hearts. They loved the spacious house, the broad sloping lawns, the majestic elm trees that shaded the yard. Nearby was the orchard with its wonderful apples and other fruit. A short distance away stood a huge, well-arranged barn. Back of that lay the pasture, the meadows, the fields. Still farther to the south, the Kaw River flowed past the small farm where they had fished, waded, and swum. All this they were leaving because Father was so unselfish he was willing to take any left-over circuit where he might preach the Gospel. But it was not only Father who left it willingly. When they realized that Father would have a chance to preach to needy souls, they all left with such cheerful abandon that even the youngest could sing, "A tent or a cottage, why should I care?"

So that is how it came about that Father and Mother, Frances, Will and Robb had squeezed themselves and their belongings into the crude old covered wagon and turned westward. Since the property in Lawrence had not yet been sold, George stayed back with Grandfather and Grandmother to help look after the house. As they rattled out the front gate, George and Grandmother waved them good-by.

At last, they were bumping their way across two hundred miles of Kansas prairie. Father was going to his first charge -- the Excelsior and Valley churches -- twelve miles from Lyons. When the winds came at night, as they did every night of that lonely journey, they were somewhat of a trial to Father. His antipathy may have been caused by the fact that his brother had once been sucked out of the house and carried some distance by a tornado. Seven of his ribs were broken and he was so bruised otherwise that his life was despaired of for a time. Now, the winds often swept across the plains almost like young tornadoes. The canvas flapped and the bows swayed from side to side until it looked as though all would be swept away. In the moaning of the wind and the squeaking of the bows, the Lord seemed to say, "You promised Me to go all the way. Do you mean it now? Do you mean you'll go with Me no matter what? Do you mean it?"

"Yes!" Father gladly answered back, as unflinching as ever. "Yes, praise God! I mean it. And I'm on my way!"



Chapter 2

In Balaam's Footsteps

"A tent or a cottage, why should I care?"

"They're building a palace for me over there."

It was good that little Robb's song voiced the deep consecration of all the French family, and that it was not just the ephemeral fancy of a passing moment. For in the years that followed, they found

themselves living in old, tumble-down houses -- once in a log cabin, and once in a shack that was turned into a cowshed after they moved out.

Mother had seemed to have a vision of the house they were to move into on this new Excelsior-Valley charge. Valley had a church building, but no parsonage, and the Excelsior congregation had neither church nor parsonage building, but worshipped in the schoolhouse. The Frenches moved into a shabby house on the bleak prairie which corresponded well with Mother's vision. The furniture had not yet arrived, so Mother spread a tablecloth on the floor, and all of them gathered around to eat in primitive fashion.

The French children were a bit puzzled by some of the privations that befell them that first winter in their new home. Why did Father not go to town and buy Christmas presents for them as he had done back in Lawrence?

"Why, Father ...?" little Robb finally was courageous enough to ask. "Why don't you go to town for presents anymore?"

Father smiled and reached into his pocket. He pulled out two pennies. "This is all I have, Son. This is why."

When Christmas came, Will and Robb each received a pair of trousers which their aunt had made from some old clothes. For Frances there was only the broken piece of an old tablet and a sweet potato. A tear slipped down her cheek in the first shock of her disappointment, but she quickly brushed it away, for she knew that Father and Mother had done the best they could.

In some ways the self-denial and doing without brought a family togetherness that might not have been effected otherwise, for not only the children suffered the lack of seeming necessities, but so did Father and Mother. Once while Father was holding a meeting in a certain place and staying in a very poor home, the lady of the house apologized as she handed him a broken piece of mirror so he could see to shave.

"You don't need to apologize," Father told her kindly. "I have been shaving by looking into a shiny buckle on my suitcase."

The place where the French family now found themselves had its compensations. Though bleak in winter, the broad wheatfields looked like a carpet of beautiful green in the springtime. In the early summer, the wheat, grown to full height and waving in the breeze, reminded one of the ocean. Later, when it turned brown, it made a charming sight.

Added to the joys of summertime was the excitement of having George with them again. The children were very happy. Now, when Father and Mother were away and the wolves and coyotes cried in the sand hills not far away, Will and Frances and Robb could go to sleep feeling much safer because George was with them.

Father preached faithfully in the little old schoolhouse, and God gave some gracious services. Some time later, the people built a nice parsonage, then, in due time, a church building. Things did not go so well at the Valley church. It was a holiness-fighting church, Father discovered.

"I'll just use tact," he decided, "and lead them gently into the light."

So, in his preaching, he studiously avoided using the terms "sanctification" or "holiness." He spoke of "perfect love" and "the victorious life" instead. The people sat with tear-stained faces and drank in the messages readily.

"We have one of the greatest preachers we have ever had," they said to one another.

But Mother was distressed. She came from the closet of prayer one day with deep concern. "Papa," she said, "God has shown me you are right in Balaam's place."

"That's right," Father agreed, "God has been telling me the same thing. I even had a dream that my main artery was cut and that I was bleeding to death."

The next Sunday when Father preached, every little while he used the terms "holiness" and "sanctification." It was like he was preaching to a different congregation. The people twisted in their seats, whispered to one another, looked daggers at the preacher. Before the next appointment, they called a meeting to vote out the pastor. When Father, Mother, and the children drew near the church for service, they could hear someone screaming. It was Sister Willard, a member of the church who had been gloriously sanctified under Father's ministry. Now, while the rest voted, she walked the aisles crying, "You are crucifying Christ! You are crucifying Christ!"

When it was all over, Father got up and preached. The next night when the French family went for service, the church building was locked. Father preached on the church steps. That year the Conference turned the church out, the doors were soon closed, and the building moved away. The people had not welcomed God's visitation.

These were days when even the smallest necessities were all prayed in. It was as simple and natural as breathing air.

"Now, Children, let us pray," Father would say, and he would start- "Give us this day our daily bread."

It was no idle prayer. They all meant it. They would have no bread unless God sent it. And when He did, it was bread to be remembered, more delicious than the bread of future, more plenteous days would ever be.

Mother never forgot the experience at the Valley church, and in her gratitude to God that Father had not given in, her consecration went deeper and deeper. She let nothing swerve her from a conviction once she was sure it had come from the Lord. She had always been that way.

One instance of this was in the case of Mother's shouting. She knew her shouting embarrassed Father (this before he was saved), but she had kept on shouting. Father persecuted her so severely that she felt she might have to leave home, but she stood her ground.

One morning Father said to Mother, "Nellie, I'm going to take you out for a ride tonight. We may meet some of the judges of the court and some of the lawyers I know so well. I don't want you looking like this. I want you to curl your hair and fix up like you used to." Then he left.

Mother thought it over. "Well, maybe I'd better keep peace in the family," she reasoned with herself.

That was way back in the days when she did not have the light that she had later -- way back when they did not have a holiness church in the town. Mother stepped to the mirror then, and when she did so, God stepped between her and the glass and said, "God or Baal."

Mother turned white. Was it as serious as that? "O God," she promised, trembling, "I'll never bow my knee to Baal."

She met Father at the door that evening, looking the same as she had when he left in the morning except that she was pale and wide-eyed.

"O Papa," she pled with him, "please don't ever say anything to me again about curling my hair.

I nearly lost my soul!"

Father looked at her a minute and then admitted, "I really believe you look better this way, anyhow, Nellie."

So it was that Mother had stepped out practically alone at first, had taken the lead in spiritual things, had suffered persecution. But it paid off a thousand-fold when Father got saved, when he came to believe as she did, when he became willing to suffer the loss of all his worldly goods to preach the Gospel.



Chapter 3

A Hiding Place

In the years when Robb and Will and Frances and George were growing up, their home life revolved around the family altar, whether their home was the spacious home of a lawyer, a tumble-down shack, or a log cabin. For Mother had resolved at the outset that if everything else went to pieces, they were going to have family prayer morning and evening.

Once when the house caught fire during morning devotions, it looked as though everything else might go to pieces, but while the others threw on water, Mother prayed. Perhaps she did more to put out the fire than did those who threw on the water, they later decided. At any rate, she was going to have family prayer if the house burned down over her head.

Mother also determined that family prayers would not be an old grind.

"Papa, Children," she said, "we're not going to have old, dry family prayers here. We're going to have holy fire burning on this family altar."

And they did. If things were dull and dry at first, they waited until the glory came. Mother knew

if they had the glory, prayer time would not be a grind, but a joy.

Even the smallest of the children learned that the family prayer hour was a hallowed time. Aunt Jennie had helped Mother to plant this feeling in their little hearts. She was visiting Mother. While prayer was going on and everyone else knelt reverently, George, then only two years old, toddled around, pulling out drawers, scattering papers, and having a good time.

When the older ones got up from their knees, Aunt Jennie turned to Mother. "Nellie," she said, "you're doing a terrible thing."

"What -- what is that?" Mother asked, startled.

"Why, letting this boy be irreverent while you're having family prayer."

"Irreverent? Why, Jennie, what are you talking about? He's only two years old. He doesn't know what he is doing."

"He does know what he is doing," Aunt Jennie persisted. "Nellie, I went to hear a missionary from the Fiji Islands. She said, 'If we get the children two years old and under, we never lose them. We're sure of them. We don't understand it, but there's something about those formative two years that is all important. If we get them when they are over two, we're never sure of them. They're likely to go back to their heathen gods.' George knows what he is doing. He needs to be taught reverence.

Mother never forgot that, and from then on, even the babies were trained to be quiet while the family prayed.

It was at the family altar that little Robb, four years of age, was saved. Mother set the chairs around in a circle as she always did, and then she said, "Children, talk to Jesus now just like you talk to Mother."

Robb had a burden on his little-boy heart this morning a burden that he did not know what to do with, but, as young as he was, he could understand those words, "Talk to Jesus just like you talk to Mother."

Kneeling at an old-fashioned, solid-bottomed chair, sobbing as though his heart would break, he told Jesus all about his troubles and his heavy heart. When he got up from his knees, there was a puddle of tears on the chair, but Robb was happier than he had ever been before. He went out on the back steps and sat in the glow of the evening sun all by himself. Everything looked so changed and beautiful that he thought he was in a new world. The trees had a different loveliness, the birds sang in a different note. Jesus had come into his heart!

Just as Mother jealously guarded the family altar and the soul interests of her children, so she earnestly instructed her little ones and faithfully took them to church.

On Saturday she would say, "Today is a busy day, Children. Put away your toys. Polish your shoes. Tomorrow is the Lord's Day. We're going to worship God tomorrow. We're going to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

When Sunday came and they neared the church, Mother would say, "Now, Children, we're going

in to worship. This is God's house. We don't want to be irreverent. If you want a drink, get it before you go in. We're not going to leave unless we absolutely have to."

Though revival meetings in the little church often lasted five or six weeks, the French family attended every night. In all kinds of weather, Father hitched up Kit and away they went in a little, old buggy with the cracker-box on the back. Father and Mother and George sat on the seat up front, the other three children in the cracker-box behind them.

On winter nights they would start out on their journey nice and warm, and then sometimes before they knew it, a Kansas blizzard would sweep across the plain, blowing snow in their faces, stinging their cheeks, buffeting them, blinding them, almost freezing them. Then again, the night might be pleasant, mild, starry, when they made their way to meeting, only to play a trick on them and pelt them with a freezing rain on the way home. Icicles would hang from Father's mustache. On one such occasion, Father's overcoat, having been soaked with rain and then frozen stiff, was able to stand on the kitchen floor by itself when he finally took it off after unhitching for the night.

It was a full five miles from the French home to the church, and it seemed more like twenty-five when the weather became unruly; but for all that, not one of the children would have missed a night of the meeting for anything. Even little Robb, six years of age, was so thrilled and stirred at his first glimpse of the church lights that he felt like turning somersaults. The rapturous singing and stirring messages were something he would never forget.

True, after about the third week of going night after night, he would be getting tired. In that event, he would curl up on the church seat during service and go to sleep. However, when the altar call was made, up he would be again, wide awake. There was something about penitents going down the aisle, the saints gathering around and praying them through that thrilled his little heart beyond expression. The family returned to their little cottage feeling almost as though they had been to heaven and back.

Mother kept a close eye on her family even after they had all found the Lord. At the family altar, Father kneeling over there, Mother over here, the children in kind of a circle between, she would say, "Robb, your testimonies don't ring like they used to; I'm afraid you're losing out. George, I've been watching you. I've been bothered about you; I've been burdened for you; I feel like you're slipping, George."

By that time they would all be weeping and sobbing. Then Father would put his arms around them, pray with them, and point them to Jesus. The first thing they knew they were having a real, old-fashioned, hallelujah time. God would come down; the Holy Ghost would melt their hearts; they would all pray through and touch God afresh. It would turn out to be a genuine revival around the family altar.

The years went on. So did the family altar. And the fire on the altar burned brighter and more brighter as Father and Mother and the children continued to honor the Lord.

It was not uncommon for the fire to fall on Father or Mother, but one morning it fell on Robb, so timid, so backward and reticent it was almost pitiful. Robb -- in the teenage stage when he seemed somehow to outgrow himself, when he couldn't even be around without upsetting the gravy at the table, or knocking over the milk, or stumbling over the stove or the coal bucket. He was so awkward and self-conscious that his life was almost a burden to him. But that morning, all the innate reserve was gone. There he was, shouting, rejoicing in the Lord! Brothers and sisters stared at him,

open-mouthed. What could have happened to Robb? There was only one answer. God had come down their souls to greet, and glory crowned the mercy seat.

Mother's prayers did much to supply the fuel for the fire on the family altar. They formed a bulwark around her children and her little home. The children found their way piled up so high with her prayers and fastings that it seemed they were helpless to climb over them to get to hell. Saturday night never found Mother in bed. That night every week she prayed all night long on her callused knees. Through the wee hours of the morning she grappled with the powers of darkness, building a wall of fire around her family.

The children did not know why Mother missed so many meals. They did not know why her eyes would sink in their sockets, why the carpet would be sopping wet with tears where she had prayed all night. Mother would sigh when she was under a burden -- the sort of sigh that sounded like a wail. A tear would steal down her face. The sigh would break out into a cry. There would be a heave and then another sigh that sounded like eternity. It seemed that no one could pray like Mother.

Mother's prayers and faithfulness bore fruit. Her children loved the things of God.

In later life, Robb remarked, "Moses' mother said Moses was a proper child. That's a mother for you. He may be as freckled as a turkey, knock-kneed, or half-witted, but he is a proper child. The mother of Moses hid him. Where can we hide our children? About the best place I know is behind the family altar. That's where Mother hid us -- in the secret place of prayer."



Chapter 4 Through the Storm

After two years on the Excelsior-Valley charge, Father was given the church at Wilson, Kansas.

Again the French family climbed into the old covered wagon and set off for new parts. This time a donkey had been added to their equipment. Many years later Robb remarked that as he read about the ass Balaam rode on his memorable journey, he was favorably inclined toward the beast, but as he thought of their own impish burro he could remember nothing about him that would have suggested anything pious. He had the habit of running fast, then stopping abruptly, putting his head down while the rider slid over his head to the ground. Many had tried, but none had been able to stay on the donkey's back, even with a saddle.

On this trip, Robb was riding the animal some distance behind the wagon when the beast performed this stunt. The first thing he knew, Robb was lying on the stony road, wounded, bruised and screaming. Finally, his absence from the company was discovered and he was rescued.

At Wilson, the Frenches found a good parsonage, a nice church building, and some fine church members. However, it was a very wicked town. In the course of time, God visited the place with a wonderful revival. It broke out in the public school, and a number of students were converted. So strong was the wicked element, however, that these converts were taken out, thrown to the ground, and beaten. Many of them fell away after this, but not without Mother's warning which she gave in

no uncertain way, and which they doubtless never forgot.

(Years later, it was at the Wilson church that Robb held his first series of evangelistic services. The meeting was held during the Christmas holidays. Robb had with him a band of students, and the Lord gave them a gracious time.)

The Frenches had carried a burden for a Bible school for some time. During their stay at Wilson, the burden intensified. Father talked the matter over with others until interest sprang up all over the conference. Some of the officials wanted Father to travel the conference, hold quarterly meetings, and stir up additional interest in the school among preachers and laymen. This Father agreed to do. So, back to the lovely home in Lawrence went the French family. The children were delighted though they knew their stay could be only temporary.

While Father was traveling, William Trusler of Eskridge, Kansas, offered a two-story stone building for the school. This the conference accepted, so the French home in Lawrence was sold, and the family once more crowded into the little prairie schooner, setting out this time for Eskridge.

It was wintertime -- December of 1900. A blizzard had been raging, but now Father thought the storm was moderating, so the wagon started on its journey. It was not long, however, until it became apparent that the blast was not over. Blizzard snows and winds swooped down across the plains upon the unsheltered wagon, buffeting fiercely the little family out on the prairie alone. Heavy though it was, the little schooner rocked and swayed beneath such fury. Its joints groaned and creaked and growled. Snow sifted in when the wind caught the canvas, almost tearing it from its ropes. When night came, the temperature dropped from twelve degrees to zero. The horses were traveling over frozen ground and their hoofs were bleeding.

Father was solicitous for his poor, suffering horses. If they could only make it to town, perhaps there would be a livery barn there which could take care of them. On they crawled, when Father noticed lights -- a farmhouse. He went up to the door to inquire about the nearest livery barn. The door opened, and who should be standing in the light of the lamp but one of Father's old friends in politics. Father was encouraged. If there is no livery barn near, he thought, it may be I can drive behind one of this man's large buildings where, at least, we will be sheltered from the force of the wind.

But the man spoke very coolly. Evidently he did not recognize Father. And no wonder. The old kerosene heater in the schooner had smoked so badly that before they had gone very far from home, the occupants were black and greasy looking from head to toe. Glancing once more longingly into the home that looked so comfortable and at the fire that was so cheery and warm, but which extended no kind welcome, Father turned his face again to the howling blizzard. On his way to the wagon, a voice sounding suspiciously like that of the tempter suggested, "It's pretty tough, isn't it, the way you are treated?"

Father, fearing seriously how the night might turn out, was able to say against the sob of the wind, "Oh, but bless God, I am still on the way. Yes, I am still on the way.

They camped that night beside the road. Mother and Will and Frances and Robb pulled the blankets and heavy quilts over their heads and snuggled down, cozy and warm on the big bed in the back of the wagon. Father and George did not fare so well. The little space in front which was theirs was too short for them to stretch out on and too cold to let them sleep. After relaxing a bit in their small quarters, they got out of the wagon, walked the frozen ground, beating their hands against their

bodies, and stamping their feet to keep from freezing. All night they alternated these procedures, until at last another day dawned, biting cold, and they were on their way again.

They arrived in Eskridge Saturday night. The furniture had been shipped earlier, and friends had hauled it to the house, piling it almost to the ceiling. Father lighted a fire, and they all began to thaw out. Since their lunch had frozen en route, they had eaten very little on the way. Now, they were too weary to care whether they ate or not. It was so good to be in a house again, even though they had to sleep on the floor that night.

Sunday, Father conducted a little service all for themselves. They were so thankful to be together, alive and warm, that, even though the house was bare and disorderly, their hearts rejoiced and their lips sang glad praises to God.

Monday was a rushed day. Everyone scurried here and there, putting down carpets, moving furniture, putting things to rights. In the midst of all the muddle, two little girls, Geraldine Trusler and Hildred Williams, came to visit. Mother let them in and asked their names. As Robb was passing through the room to get a mop, Mother stopped him. "Robb," she said, "these little girls are Geraldine Trusler and Hildred Williams, neighbor girls."

The girls were giggling, and Robb, sorely embarrassed, hoped they would soon leave or that he could somehow get away. He did not know then that, through the years, charming little Geraldine with the big, brown eyes, would hold a very special place in his heart and life. Hildred was the daughter of the pastor, and what a pastor he proved to be! No one, it seemed, could listen to his stirring sermons and be subjected to one of his rugged tests without feeling almost as though he had been before the Judgment Seat of Christ. The best of saints often wiped the perspiration from their faces and pled the blood of the Saviour as he spoke.

Eskridge was to be the scene of some of the greatest experiences and fondest memories of the French family. The school opened in the spring of 1904 with nine scholars, who sat on kitchen chairs around a kitchen table. Hildred, Glen and Melvin Williams, Golden and Geraldine Trusler, and George, Frances, Will, and Robb French made up the student body. The nine were not to be the only ones for long. Young people soon began to pour in from far and near. God's approval rested on the effort from the start. There seemed to be little or no need for recreation, so manifest was the presence of the Holy Spirit in the schoolrooms and in the public services. At one time, teachers and students met in one of the rooms to pray. Around and around they prayed, from the oldest to the youngest taking turns, until the Spirit fell. The glory of that hour was indescribable.

From the very first, it seemed, there was an understanding between the small, tow-headed French boy and the wee, brown-haired Trusler girl just a year younger than he. Notes passed in the schoolroom written in a scrawly, little-boy hand, and found their way to where she sat. "I'll be your sweetheart if you'll be mine," they said. Just what was written in answer has never been told, but when small Robb had a birthday, little Geraldine bought a nice New Testament to give him. What should she write in it a Scripture verse? Which one? She searched and pondered. Ah! Here was a verse that sounded grown-up and good. It said, "My son, remember my law." This she painstakingly copied on a blank page in the front and ended with "Happy Birthday, from Geraldine." She wrapped the precious Book in dainty paper and gave it to Robb. Though in later years he had occasion to smile at the admonition accompanying it, the gift was one he never forgot.

Father's school was carried on prayerfully. Problems were taken by the staff, not to a council room for discussion, but to their knees for presentation to their Heavenly Father. At one time, Miss Reed,

the music teacher, became dissatisfied with the policy of the school. She gave notice on this particular day that she was on her way to give her last lesson and then she was going to leave town.

About noon the administration and some students gathered in an upstairs room to fast and pray.

So great was the burden for this teacher that sixteen people lay on the floor as dead.

Robb, a barefoot boy of eleven or twelve years, looked on in wonder. This is God! he thought as he stood there awe-stricken. I'm going to see this.

The president of the school lay flat on his back, his arms rigid, his face bloodless. Finally he got up. "I don't believe there's any hope for her," he said. "I couldn't get my burden through. I'm afraid she's crossed the deadline."

One after another arose and said the same thing -- "We couldn't get our burden through."

Now the door opened and in stepped none other than she -- the music teacher. There she stood -- tall, dignified, looking scorn at the whole group.

"What does this mean?" she demanded in words as cold as icicles.

"This means we've been under a burden for your soul," Father said. "Probably the last opportunity you'll have."

If anything, Father's words had the effect of only deepening her scorn. She looked mad enough to pick up a stove poker and beat him over the head. Finally, she took a chair and placed it in front of the door. Then she sat down, looking hostile and defiant at the crowd. Whether she placed the chair where she did, purposely, so that no one could go in or out, nobody knew; but it served that purpose. Robb saw that it would be impossible to get out, but he did not want out. I'm going to see this through, he resolved again.

For breathless moments, the teacher sat glaring. Only a smothered sob here and there could be heard in the deathlike stillness. Then old Mrs. Bates groaned as though she were dying. Only now did the others see that Mrs. Bates had not risen from the floor. People had confidence in Mrs. Bates.

Mother French joined hands with Geraldine's mother. "It looks like a hopeless case," one of them said, "but here's Mrs. Bates. She's still under the burden."

Down they went on their knees in a covenant to hold on until victory should come. They wept.

They prayed. "Lord, the lights are out, they cried. "It's dark -- oh-h, so dark. But You taught us the parable of the man that kept knocking even after the lights were out. It looks as though it's hopeless, Lord, but we're knocking. We're going to hold on till You give us what we want."

Robb's head was bowed, but he saw his mother and Mrs. Trusler in their agony. How would the music teacher take this? He glanced at her. The defiant head tipped slightly -- ever so slightly. Would she give in? Would she break? Robb watched her still more closely. Then he saw the lips begin to move. "Thank God! " he said, almost aloud. "Looks like she's praying!"

In another moment down went the teacher in a heap by the chair -- weeping, sobbing. All afternoon and night she struggled and prayed. It seemed to Robb that it was like a bloodstained battlefield. The forces of light would charge and the devil would retreat. Then the devil would charge and the saints would be forced to retreat. Back and forth the battle raged. But at 4:15 in the morning, the victory was gained. It was a victory worth celebrating, so teachers and prayers, including Robb, celebrated until a quarter past six. They had been there a total of some eighteen hours. Miss Reed went out from that place to become a successful evangelist.

"You couldn't buy that picture from my memory wall for all the money in the state," Robb said many years later. "I'm glad I lived in a generation when God manifested Himself and when souls travailed. People aren't going to get saved unless someone gets under a burden for them."

There were other severe battles and tests while the French family served God in Eskridge. One cold night it looked as though Will would choke to death with diphtheria. With every struggle to catch a breath, it seemed he would die. Father slipped out into the kitchen, cold and frosty, and prayed.

"Lord," he said, "I gave my children to Thee, and it seems as though now since I dedicated them to Thee and Thy service, Thou art going to take them out.

"Haven't I a right to do with Mine own what I will?" his Heavenly Father gently asked. Father acquiesced, never once going back on his consecration. It wasn't long until Will recovered.

When Robb was still just a young lad of perhaps fourteen or fifteen years, he had a dream. He thought that Jesus was coming that night, and he thought everyone knew it. They all talked about it among themselves. Yes, no doubt about it. He was coming that night. Little handfuls of people were standing everywhere, and that was what they were talking about. They were all excited. Yes, He's coming tonight, better be prepared.

And so they were waiting for Jesus to come. They were expecting a light to shine in the East and reflect in the West. As they looked, sure enough a light slipped over the horizon and began to scintillate there in the eastern sky. Yes, He was coming! They were on tiptoe in suspense, waiting for His face to appear!

But I don't feel anything pulling me upward, Robb thought to himself. I wonder if there's anything in my heart that would keep me from going. I wonder if I'm ready. Oh, have I failed somewhere?

The suffering Robb went through that night was indescribable. When he awakened and found it was only a dream, his heart started aching. He got out of bed and, sinking to his knees, said, "Oh, Lord, don't let that be a reality. When Thou dost come, I want to know that everything is in the clear.

I don't want to be careless and drifting, and doing things I wouldn't have done a few years ago. Keep me ready!"

Robb and four others -- still just boys -- went out from the school to hold a meeting in the country near Ames, Kansas. They pitched a tent. It was a hard community, but the boys were on fire for the Lord, and they wanted to see something go. Robb, Will and their two cousins would go out in the woods and pray and groan and cry. Finally, they got down in the meeting-house and one cousin prayed, "O God, stir this community. Waken folk up. Send a cyclone if necessary."

Lo and behold, a day or two later, an awful cyclone struck. Nobody was killed, but it mowed a swath through that community, tearing down churches, houses and barns. It ripped through buildings as though they were cornstalks.

Some strangers had just come to town. When they heard about the prayer, they said, "Those boys ought to be strung up to a pole. Why do they allow that?"

A big sinner walked out and said, "You'd better keep your hands off those boys. They had enough religion to pray a cyclone on this town. They may pray a cyclone down on you."

The boys had things going their way.

In later years Robb sometimes likened the wrath of God to the storms in Kansas. He once said, "We used to have awful drouths in Kansas, followed by storms." Sometimes it would cloud up and the thunders would roll and the lightings flash, and then, all of a sudden, it would get still. Not a leaf seemed to move. Even the animals the cows in the pasture seemed restless about something.

Stillness! What was it? The lull before the storm. Do you know what we're in? We're just in the lull before the blast of the trumpet when God turns loose his unmitigated wrath on people who have trampled His Son under their feet. I have a fear of God -- a reverential fear. Our God is a consuming fire. O if we knew the storm, the lurid lightning, the roll of distant thunder that is about to break! O America, thou art a godless nation!"



Chapter 5

Pioneering In Alabama

After some years the Eskridge school was moved to Wakefield, and then to Miltonvale, Kansas.

When this took place, the local people felt that their school at Eskridge should continue at least until their own children could finish their education. Thus Eskridge Bible School was maintained for some time longer. Father again became president and held this office until Raymond Young, a graduate of Peniel University, was secured to take his place.

As the work was prospering, Father French felt free to turn his attention to a desire he had long entertained of establishing an industrial school where poor students could work their way through school. His brother, an officer in the Salvation Army, had charge of opening up Army Industrial Homes in the South. He wrote to Father about the cheap land near Birmingham, Alabama. Mr. Kewish and Father French went down and bought a 500-acre farm near Eden, later incorporated into Pell City.

Mother was rather averse to the idea because of her deep interest in the work at Eskridge. But one night as she knelt in prayer, the Lord definitely spoke to her and said, "I want you in Alabama."

Things began to move rapidly after that. Two freight cars were chartered. Stock and other belongings were stored in the respective cars, and with William French in one car and Harry Kewish

in the other, they left for Alabama. The remaining members of the families followed on the passenger train. It was quite a reunion when they arrived at Eden, Alabama, and joined those who had gone on before.

Everything was new -- both country and people. However, the newcomers soon fell deeply in love with the southern people and were ever afterwards to count themselves as real southerners. Soon after arriving, the Frenches settled on the farm. A small building was erected in which a grade school was conducted and church services were held.

The Frenches and Kewishes had not been in Alabama long when Mr. Kewish decided to take the entire 500-acre farm. Father French rather took it as a divine providence. Mother never was enthusiastic about the farm venture for fear they would all be engulfed in too much materialism.

Father then bought a tent and the family launched out into pioneer evangelism, with Father and Robb alternating in preaching, Will leading the singing, Frances playing the organ and Mother praying and exhorting.

They pitched the tent first at Eden. God blessed graciously. From there they moved the tent to Pell City. Two young ladies, Dora Walker and Frances Compton, had prayed that a revival might come to Pell City. Others painted a discouraging picture of the prospects. They said there was so much drunkenness and fighting on the streets that it was dangerous to be out at night. Still others declared that many people in Pell City would not attend religious services. However, the tent was pitched.

For about two and a half weeks very little seemed to be accomplished. About that time, Tom Miller, a very likable man, but a terrible drunkard, was saved. This was used of God to stir the people for miles around. The crowds increased until they were almost unwieldy, and for some thirteen weeks the meeting ran on. The picture show closed; the poolroom closed; the dance pavilion closed. The Spirit of the Lord came mightily on the place. Noted drunkards, gamblers and criminals were saved. At times the tent served only as a center for the great crowds assembled on the common.

Men were saved who worked in the mill. They shouted the victory to such an extent that the manager shut down the mill. He feared they would be caught in the machinery in the midst of their rejoicing.

Frances Compton and Dora Walker were in their glory. God, and only God, was answering their prayers. Frances claimed the conversion of her brother. He had been drunk as early as six years of age. He was uneducated and inclined to be wild and uncouth. Later in life he told how he used to eat peanuts, hulls and all, and drink anything that had alcohol in it. Will French fairly ran him down and led him to the altar. The Lord wonderfully saved Virgil Compton, and he became quite an able preacher.

Boss Phillips was doubtless one of the most notorious drunkards and criminals in the state. Frequently he was in the penitentiary and in jail. He came to the tent one hot August night, drunk and wearing a stolen overcoat. The next night during the altar call he came down the aisle weeping and fell at the altar. A young man hurried to the platform.

"That man kneeling there is the leader of the underworld," he told Robb. "You better pray for him. If he gets converted, it will shake the whole country."

But Boss Phillips was doing such a good job praying he did not seem to need much help. Soon

he bounded to his feet, praising the Lord and shaking hands with everyone, the tears running down his face. People looked on dumfounded as though they could not believe their eyes.

Numbers of other very wicked people were converted. The Frenches did not count converts. But one of the gentlemen who, with his wife, took deep interest in the tent meeting, estimated that 750 people were converted. A good church was organized with ninety members.

Many memorable experiences attended the evangelistic labors of the French family. Father, Mother, Will, Robb and Frances started out one time from Tuscaloosa in a Model T Ford, planning to go to Birmingham and on to Pell City. At first the little car had good power. It was taking its occupants along at a steady clip, and they were getting along fine. Then, almost imperceptibly at first, the engine started to wheeze. The noise increased, the farther they went.

"What's the matter with this car?" Robb wanted to know. "Sounds like it has asthma or something.

Wonder if anything could be wrong with the radiator?" (Robb never professed to be a mechanic.) Finally the machinery developed an ominous rattle and could hardly make the hills. But they kept on. They would drive down a hill as fast as they safely could to get all the momentum possible, then go up the next one as far as the car would take them. When it chugged down, all but the driver would jump out and push it over the hill to get a good start down the other side. The noise kept getting worse and worse, until it was nothing but a clatter. Finally, Robb stopped, climbed out, and looked in the radiator. At this juncture a man came along.

"What's your trouble?" he asked good-naturedly.

That, of course, was what Robb wanted to know. The man reached for the crank and turned the engine over.

"Why, you're out of oil, that's what."

"Oh -- "

The Ford did have a little glass gauge to show how much oil the engine had, but that had been broken, and the oil had gradually leaked out. Fortunately, the man had some oil. He put it in, and the Model T got the party to their destination. Damage had been done, however, and some repairs were necessary.

My, my! thought Robb. Sometimes we try to have revivals and fail to make sure we have plenty of oil. Oil. Prayer is to the church, to the home, to every part of life what oil is to machinery. No wonder we clatter around, and revivals chug down. We need the oil of prayer.



Chapter 8

The Power of God

On their way back to college the next autumn, the boys stopped off in a little community on

Lookout Mountain in Alabama where there was no holiness church. There were perhaps only five or six people who knew anything at all about holiness.

Robb and Will pitched a tent not far from a former pleasure resort -- a lake with a race track around it. Here they started a meeting. They had had only a service or two when the weather turned chilly and rainy. Everything appeared to be against them. There was no great conviction on sinners nor much burden on the part of the saints. If the community had been indifferent to spiritual things before, it was even more so now. The young people became immoderately frivolous and careless, the older people woefully apathetic. Never had there been such an inauspicious time for a meeting, it seemed. But the boys struggled along.

Then something happened which threatened to terminate the meeting in downright ignominy and defeat. While Robb was preaching one Sunday night, a commotion arose in the back of the tent. At first Robb thought one of their improvised, plank seats had given way. But the next thing the boys knew, men were carrying someone out. Somebody's fainted, Robb concluded.

Then a lady near the front jumped to her feet. "Praise God!" she shouted. "God's talking to this community!"

"Well, praise the Lord!" Robb thought, "I've seen such things as this before, but I didn't expect to see it here, so small has been my faith."

He went on with the service and when it was over he and Will went out. There was a man's body on the ground where he had been laid. It was Frank Green. Friends were bathing his face with cold water, trying to bend his muscles, working to revive him, but he lay there stiff and rigid just as though he were dead. The Methodist preacher stood over him.

"That man is paralyzed," he concluded. "He'll be dead in two hours."

The doctor came. "Nervous prostration," he said, professionally, but under his breath he muttered, "Those boys are hypnotizing folk here. That man's under a spell."

Men carried the afflicted one to an old house on the lake front, and the preacher boys went home. The next day when Robb and Will arrived at the tent for morning service, no one was there but a Baptist deacon. He was crying.

"We're in a terrible fix here, boys. Do you know that?" he began. "These people are mad enough to string you boys up to a pole. They think you put a spell on that fellow and they're mad. What do you think about it?"

"Joe," Robb said, "I believe it's the power of God. And I believe if we'll just pray and not fear, he'll come out all right."

"Well, if this is the power of God, I hope you pray that God will bring it out so clear everybody will have to acknowledge it," Joe urged, "because I'm telling you they're mad here."

A few folk straggled in for the morning service and advised the boys to go over to the house.

When they did so, they found a hostile crowd. The stricken man was lying on the bed, his muscles

as stiff and rigid as ever. Hale Howie was kneeling by his bedside, trying to get him to bend even so much as his little finger to show some sign of coming to life, but he lay there seemingly as lifeless as a plank of wood.

"Now, Frank, just bend a finger here," Hale kept repeating.

Again Robb spoke. "Folk, I still believe this is the power of God, and I feel sure if we just let him alone and pray, he'll come out all right."

Hale waited till Robb's back was turned. Then he muttered under his breath, "If that's the power of God, I'll stamp my hat!"

Just then the doctor came back. "You'd better get him away from the tent," he ordered. "Get him as far away from this influence as you can."

The doctor's anxiety corroborated the fears of many. "I wouldn't shake hands with those boys for anything in the world," a wide-eyed bystander declared.

"Nor I," echoed another. "It's dangerous even to be this near to them."

They carried Frank to his own house two miles away. Most of the community knew nothing about holiness. They were tobacco-chewing church members. But they were interested in Frank now and what the holiness tent meeting had done to him. One could take the telephone receiver down anytime day or night, and that was the topic of conversation.

"Frank Green," one would say, "he's still in that condition."

People came from everywhere. They came up from the valley. They came even from Georgia.

They filed in to see Frank Green like they would to see a body lying in state.

"What do you think about it all?" they asked one another.

"I don't know," was the only answer.

They stood around and cried awhile and then went home. While they were leaving, others came.

Frank Green's condition was the talk everywhere.

Frank lay stone-like all day Monday and all Monday night. Tuesday noon he began to talk.

"Friends," he groaned, "I'm burdened for four men." He named the most wicked men in all that section of the country--bootleggers, drinkers. "Unless they get saved, I feel like I can't hold out much longer. I'll die!"

The deacons and all those who were standing over Frank weeping backed away in astonishment. Frank Green was a man everyone had confidence in. He was a clean fellow, with no bad habits, and had been genuinely converted. And for him to say that -- well, they knew someone had better move.

Two of the men Frank had named were in the room then, standing by his bedside. Fellows started out on mule and horseback to find the other two. When they finally got the four men together, they said, "Now, men, we don't understand this, but Frank's been in this condition long enough. He says he's burdened for you four men, and unless you get saved, he's going to die. Now, you'd better get busy."

Two of the unsaved men sneaked up the stairs; two slunk to the woods. And, as God would have it, all four prayed through at about the same time. When they did, Frank Green rose from his bed as normal as any man.

"I'm hungry," he told them. "I'd like to have something to eat."

Just as people had filed in to look at Frank as he lay on the bed, so now people came to the same room to kneel and pray through. When each struck victory, he hustled out to make room for another.

All this time, Robb and Will were two miles away from where the real revival was going on. So one of the new converts called them on the phone.

"We're coming to the tent tonight," the person announced, "and we want you to turn the meeting over to us."

The boys agreed.

"It's the first time I've turned a meeting over to holiness fighters," Robb commented to Will, "but I tell you this crowd has changed."

Long before time for service to begin, the boys heard them coming -- coming from every direction, some on horses coming through the woods, some on foot, some in carriages. When all had assembled, the sun had set. The old gasoline torches gave little more than enough light to draw the bugs, but a halo hung over the service that night from the very first.

"Now, friends," Robb addressed the people, "we've had a remarkable demonstration of God's power and we're going to have an informal service -- we're just going to turn everybody loose. Everybody, obey God."

The first to step out of the crowd that night was Tom Jones. He was an elderly man. His six-foot-four frame towered over the audience impressively. His long arms gesticulated appropriately to his words. "Neighbors and friends," he addressed them, "you know me and I know you. I've lived in this community practically all my life. When Frank Green fell there, I was scared and I was mad, and I stayed that way till he came out of it. One of the men he was burdened for was my boy, and he's here tonight to testify. Neighbors, we haven't believed what these boys have preached. We've opposed them, but we'll have to go back on ourselves. Everybody that knows anything about this will have to acknowledge this is the power of God."

"That's what we prayed for," commented the boys.

The second man to step out was Hale Howie. He went to the front, stepped up on the altar and began, "Ladies and gentlemen, you know me and I know you. I'm a man of my word. When Mr. French said over in Frank's room that it was the power of God, it made me mad, and I said, 'If this

is the power of God, I'll stamp my hat.' Well, I'm going to stamp it right here tonight. I'm a man of my word."

Down went Hale's hat He stamped it hard with his foot and declared, "No man can deny that this is the power of God. Look what's happened here. Look at these souls that have been saved." On he went. Hale was quite a talker.

When Hale sat down, the next man up was Frank's father, old Brother Green. He was so wrought upon that he was trembling. "Neighbors and friends," he sobbed, "I can say the same thing. I know you and you know me. I'm the father of Frank. I love my boy and I've stood by him. I said, 'If he's going to die, I'm going to be by his side when he breathes his last' I watched this thing from the beginning and, neighbors and friends, we'll all have to stack our arms. These boys have been preaching the truth and we'll have to acknowledge this is the power of God."

The climax of the meeting came when the four men were called to testify. Horace Jones was the first. "Friends," he said, "I got so hard that nothing moved me. I was cold and God knew it. Nothing short of this would ever have reached my heart. I love Frank Green and when he was laid out, I said, 'I'm going to quit work. I'm going to stay by his side. If he's going to die, I'm going to be there when he passes away.' When I found out he was burdened for me, it tore me all to pieces. I couldn't do anything else but surrender and yield to the Lord. Something began to tell me it wasn't right to use tobacco. I don't know. I'm going to pray about it. If it's the Lord, I'm going to quit it. I'm going to find out and I'll report later on.

The rest of the four men testified and the service broke loose. There was no need for the boys to plead with people to come to the altar. They didn't have to coax or sing another verse. The people just came.

In a night or two, Horace Jones stood again to speak. "Well, boys," he reported concerning his tobacco-chewing problem, "I can't use 'er. God won't let me chew 'er and I've quit. Bless God!"

Later, Robb told Will, "That's worth a dozen sermons on tobacco here where it's nothing at all for people to come to church chewing it, spitting tobacco juice everywhere. Just to hear a fellow right out of the crowd get up and say, 'God won't let me chew it any longer,' is the best argument against it I know of."

Just as the theme song of the lake community had formerly been called, "Moon Lake," now the theme song for the rest of the meeting was, "Moon Lake for Christ" It looked for all the world as though the whole community would get saved, as though the song would be a reality.

Robb approached Frank one day. "Frank," he said, "I know such things are sacred, and I'm almost afraid to ask you any questions because people generally don't like to talk about things so intimate.

If you don't mind, would you tell me about your experience? If you do mind, just don't say anything."

"Mr. French," Frank began, "you know how I am. I can't talk. I've no talents, no ability, nothing that God can use. But I was coming to church that night and I said, 'O God, if you could use me to win a soul!' I drove on around the old race track on the opposite side of the lake, got out of my buggy, knelt down and prayed, 'O God, here I am.' I hadn't the least thought of anything like what happened -- but the Holy Ghost just put those four men on my heart."

Frank Green nearly died in the whole procedure, but everyone, even Frank, agreed heartily that it was worth it all. A holiness church emerged from the Lord's marvelous dealings in that meeting, and for years following, people would take a newcomer and show him just where Frank Green had lain, just where it had all happened.

"God picked out the right man," Robb often said to Will. "If it had been one of us, they probably would have said, 'That's just one of the pranks the holiness crowd plays.' But when it happened to one of their own crowd! Brother, it was like taking the heart right out of the whole bunch! I knew it was all God's doings."

Neither at that time nor in all the years afterward did Robb and Will take any credit for the souls that were saved.

The boys had spent nearly everything they had in pitching the tent and getting the meeting started. Now, it looked discouraging indeed to think of entering school without any money. They said nothing about their financial condition, but God began to touch the hearts of the people, and money commenced to come in. A young lady said, "I quit paying my tithe. God wants me to give my back tithe to you." She gave Robb the largest check he had ever received up to that time.

Father and Mother Shigley and family were holiness people and old timers in the community. Brother Shigley was in his glory seeing his neighbors getting into the Kingdom. He said to Robb one day, "I thought you and Will were foolish to sing, 'Moon Lake for Christ' I thought such a thing couldn't be, but it looks like this whole country is getting saved."

The boys had to leave. They took down the tent, but the meeting went on. Folk would write telling of the gracious work still continuing in that place. Sister Frances joined the boys in Nashville. They rented rooms and batched. The people of Lookout Mountain sent them barrels of apples, chickens, canned fruit and vegetables. They lived on the fat of the land.

Chapter 11

Revival at Birmingham

Father, and then Will, had been president of the Alabama conference in the past, and all the Frenches were interested in starting a church in Birmingham. Robb and Geraldine felt that they should risk everything if necessary to accomplish this. The conference gave them a tent and also thirty dollars to help with expenses. Other holiness denominations had started churches, but they had located so far out that it was difficult for the people to reach them, having to transfer as they did from one street car to another to reach the suburbs. Thus, the Frenches felt the necessity of pitching the tent in a central downtown section. Of course, what seemed to be the insurmountable difficulty was to get a permit to pitch the tent near the heart of the city.

"No," the city councilman said, "you can't pitch a tent here. This is a fire-restricted district."

But the Frenches still went ahead making plans and praying all the while.

The fire inspector, the city commissioner and other officials kept insisting, "Don't you know that it's useless to think of such a thing? You can't do that. It's a city ordinance. You can't put a tent here."

Still the Frenches prayed, knowing that God was bigger than the city council.

Finally one day, a councilman said, "Well, come up and see the head councilman."

Robb went, shining in his boots. "I just don't have the faith I ought to have," he said to himself. Presently, the Commissioner of Public Safety addressed him. "What do you want?" he began.

"I want permission to pitch a tent on that lot," Robb answered.

"Let me have that petition," the commissioner said. And he stuck it in his pocket as he wrote Robb an order to put the tent there.

Folk were amazed to see the tent pitched on this restricted lot. Prominent people came around and said, "How did you do it? How did you get this here? They wouldn't have let me do it."

"We didn't do it," Robb insisted. "God did it. To God belongs all the praise and glory."

From the start God's blessing rested upon this effort. Good crowds attended the revivals. Regular services were held under the tent for three years. The Frenches heated the place in winter, first with charcoal burners and later with coal stoves. Numbers of holiness people lined up with them, and new members united with the church.

Once a young man with his wife came to the tent He said to Robb, "I want to subscribe \$100 for this work and we want to join the church." This was Hershel Tillman and his good wife. They were earnest, faithful, and deeply spiritual. He was a wonderful personal worker. Charles Pickel was another young man who was powerfully converted in the tent meeting. He too became a devout and diligent worker for the Lord. Together, these two men made a wonderful team. Evangelists who helped in meetings would say, "When Brother Tillman and Brother Pickel kneel beside a seeker, we notice the penitent almost always comes through."

The Frenches and their people conducted four street meetings, four shop meetings, and four prayer meetings a week. The young converts did not need to be entertained; they were too busy for the Lord.

In addition to this regular schedule, there were cottage prayer meetings, house-to-house visitation, and tract distribution.

When finally, after about two years, officials tried to put the tent off the lot, a big, burly sinner came to Robb and said, "Hey, here, I understand they're trying to put you off the lot."

"Well," Robb said, "they served us notice to leave."

The notice had come from the state -- the State of Alabama! And the State of Alabama looked like a giant.

The man said, "Leave it to me.

That "big, old bluff of a sinner" went up to the courthouse and said, "Now, look here. You're trying to put a Protestant Church off that lot down there. And I want you to know if you run a Protestant Church off that lot, there's going to be a holy war right here in this town, and we'll mop up on you."

Had the truth been known, there was not a thing on earth to it. It was all a bluff. But that fellow came down the street with a yellow paper in his pocket and said, "Hey, I got a lease for that lot, a free lease, for as long as you want it."

It was a time of rejoicing for the Frenches and their little flock. Said Robb, "That's one time the Lord harnessed up the devil to whip the devil!"

They thought that now they were getting on their feet, but it was not long until Robb felt as though his feet were again being knocked out from under him. He went to a meeting one night in a large church of the town. The preacher arose and said, "Now the Church Federation of this city is solidly united against a false doctrine which is being preached here -- holiness. We are here as a church federation to stamp it out.

Robb felt himself getting smaller all the time. "You talk about feeling like a grasshopper," he told someone. "I was smaller than a grasshopper. I thought, Church Federation! Why, they wouldn't leave a grease spot if they'd start in on us. But, you know, when I went out of that church and started down the steps, the Lord said to me, 'I'll make you the head, not the tail. Thou shalt be from above and not from beneath.' I don't believe we ought to let the devil run roughshod over us. We've got some mighty weapons. They're not carnal weapons, but they're mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan."

Eventually the congregation bought a two-story, roomy, brick house with somewhat of a church-front appearance. Not one of the forty members in the church at this time owned his own home free of debt. A \$15,000 debt was a big mountain in those days. People said, "You're going to have a white elephant on your hands."

Robb hated debt, but he was willing to be reckless when it was for the Lord. They did not have suppers or fairs. They just trusted God and people tithed. Some said to Robb, "If you'll join the Masons and play up to the lodges, they'll pay this debt for you." But Robb said, "No, we're not interested."

This is how they got their money. One day a little girl came down the aisle with a tin box and handed it to Robb. She said, "Brother French, I've been saving this for a long time."

The box was rather heavy, and Robb was interested in knowing how much it held. He thought that perhaps there was a little money in there, but was greatly surprised to find that it was practically full of pennies, nickels, and dimes. When some of them counted it, they found that it amounted to over five dollars -- quite a sum at that time.

When the little girl's mother heard about it, she said, "Where did Myrtle get that money? [They were very poor people and the father was a drunkard.] Myrtle is too honest to steal, but where could she get it? Did she steal it?"

She probed Myrtle. The little girl did not want to tell, but finally, she explained that instead of spending the nickel or dime her mother gave her occasionally to buy her meal at school, she would fast and put the money in that little box to help pay off the debt on the church.

At first Robb and Geraldine had moved into a room in an old dilapidated rooming house. The plaster was falling from the ceiling, while roaches and their kindred had set up shop in large numbers. After cleaning, scrubbing, and fumigating, the Frenches moved in some furniture. Besides a bed, they had one orange crate for a washstand and a little stove, which Robb could lift with one finger, for a cooking and heating stove. On their way from the tent to their room -- about five or six blocks -- they gathered broken boards and boxes, which had dropped from trucks, for fuel. Many happy days were spent in these headquarters, praying, believing, and watching the wonderful movings of the Spirit.

Sometime after the purchase of the two-story brick building, Robb and Geraldine moved into a couple of its rooms and took charge of renting out the rest of the rooms. This helped greatly in paying for the property.

The Frenches had an interesting neighbor while here. They never knew his correct name, but the children called him "Grump." He threw his garbage over into the Frenches' yard, built fires on their side, tore down two fences and was in the process of tearing down another when Robb felt that he had had enough. He got down on his knees and cried, "Lord, move Grumpy over to be neighbor to someone else."

But the Lord said, "No, you let him stay right there. You need him."

Once, in recalling this incident, Robb said to an audience, "God will let you know whether you're sanctified or not He'll send a mean neighbor to live by you."

Occasionally Robb would be confronted with a discouraged husband who would complain, "Brother French, you don't know my wife. The angel Gabriel couldn't live with her."

Remembering what God had told him regarding Grumpy, Robb would reply, "God doesn't want the angel Gabriel to live with her. He wants you to live with her. You got her on your hands. That's one reason the Book of Daniel was written -- to show us the Lord can keep us in a lion's den."

The Lord enabled the Frenches to have a number of strong evangelists in Birmingham to help in revivals and weekend meetings. These included Jesse Whitecotton, Bud Robinson, the Zike-Meyers party, George Ridout, E. E. Shelhamer, W. L. Surbrook, W. L. Thompson and many others. Will was president of the conference about this time and he held quarterly meetings and other special services for them. His counsel and messages were a great blessing.

After the building was remodeled and services were being held in it, the Lord gave an outstanding revival. The evangelist bore down on the truth of II Chronicles 7:14, "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

He insisted that the revival must begin in the hearts of God's people, and that the channel through which the Holy Ghost seeks to operate must be clear. All gossiping, evil speaking, bitterness, strife, and sins of every kind must be properly and thoroughly confessed to God and to our fellowman,

insofar as we have wronged them, and restitution made before the Holy Ghost will give true revival.

Through two protracted meetings and for some weeks, the best of the congregation went down in heart searching, earnest prayer, and confession. Five and a half weeks were spent just cleaning house. At one time the meeting got tight. A spirit of heaviness pressed in. The preacher could hardly preach. The singers could hardly sing. Finally, one night, when they were all gathered around the altar, a woman began to confess.

"I want you all to forgive me," she said. "I've been critical. I haven't said much with my lips, but I've had criticism in my heart. I want you to put the blame all on me.

In speaking of it, Robb said, "You know the atmosphere commenced to get clearer. Praise the Lord! People were going across town at midnight and after to make adjustments, to beg forgiveness, to pay up something. I can see the Sunday school teacher coming down the aisle boo-hoing. She turned and said, 'I got my feelings hurt. I've acted like a baby. I've absented myself from the church just because I couldn't have my way. I want you all to forgive me. I am going to ask God to forgive me.' "

Some serious things came to light, even cases of immorality, and these were repented of. "This was no reflection on the general congregation who were wonderful people," commented Robb, "but it does suggest that many revivals are held up by unsuspected covered sin."

When the last confession was properly made, the sweet, prevailing presence of the Holy Ghost settled down upon the services. For some eight months a mighty revival Spirit pervaded the regular services. "It just ran itself," said Robb. "The Holy Ghost ran it. It's astonishing what can be done when everything's out of the way."

Those days were wonderful days to the Frenches. They seemed to be in another world much of the time. Robb and Geraldine had gone over the city making adjustments and confessing to estranged people. Geraldine was gloriously sanctified. The Lord seemed to give her a spirit of discernment. In a later revival which was going hard, the Lord revealed to her that the treasurer of the church was taking money out of the treasury. She went to him in brokenness of spirit, and, weeping like a child, he confessed that it was all true. The Spirit fell in mighty power, making that a day to be long remembered.

Chapter 14

The Darkest Hour -- and the Brightest

Father and Mother, Will and his wife stayed in Oregon for five more years. Father was then called to the First Church in Los Angeles, California. After pastoring this church for some five years, he accepted pastoral responsibility for a small group in Pasadena for the next three years. The Lord graciously blessed.

George French, who was pastor of the Free Methodist Church in Whittier, California, was the first of the immediate French family to pass away. He and his wife, Florence, had one son, Gerald, who

became a career officer in the Air Force.

After George's death, his wife wanted Robb and Geraldine to come and stay with her and her only son. It was one of the hardest things Robb ever tried to do. But he went. Of course, he wanted to be of help to the bereaved sister-in-law, so he put on his brother's overalls, and when need arose, got in his car and ran errands. The feeling that came over him was unutterable. He was driving the same car his brother had driven and was working with the same tools he had used.

One day Robb was mowing the lawn and cleaning up around the premises. The morning was so beautiful, the sky so blue, that every once in a while he would lift his head toward the sky. It seemed that his brother was trying to talk to him.

I know what he wants to say, Robb thought to himself. He wants to say, "Robb, I used to be down in that kind of world where you are. Those things look big to you. Where I am, those things look awfully small. Don't get too much wrapped up in them."

When Robb would tell this experience, he knew his listeners were wanting to ask, "Brother French, if we serve the Lord, will it make us slouchy housekeepers and careless, shiftless workers?" and he would answer the question, "No! That isn't what I'm talking about, but that we'll put first things first. We're so earthly-minded. Things! Things! Things! We're not drunk on corn liquor. We're drunk on food, cars, frigidaires, and things! Oh, may God shake us loose from things!"

Mother French, in her eighty-second year, passed away in October 1935. Her life had been one of constant prayer. Dead to the world, determined only that her family might live to glorify God, her goal was to see all her children in Gospel work. Thus, it was doubtless through her prayers that all four of her children entered Christian service.

After the word of Mother's illness reached Robb, he hastened across the continent from Sandy Lake, Pennsylvania, to Pasadena, California, trying to get to her bedside. Even so, he did not realize how serious she was. Neither did the folk who were with her.

Robb called and asked, "Shall I come by plane?"

"No," came the answer, "but come as quickly as you conveniently can."

Mother had looked out the window wistfully. "I think Robb will be here," she told them. Now he was speeding across the plains, one day through dismal fog, the next through rain that was coming down in sheets.

When, after many anxious days, the train rolled into the Alhambra station, Robb saw his sister-in-law among the others there to meet him.

He said to himself, "I'm afraid something is wrong. Why should she be here?"

He fairly tumbled down the steps. "How's Mother?" he choked.

"Mother's gone!" she whispered.

Gone! Mother gone! It was the darkest hour Robb had ever known. He staggered into the little

station and found a seat. It seemed as though he had no further desire to live, as though the sun had gone down to shine no more. It seemed as though he could never enjoy the flowers anymore. They would never again be so fragrant. And they never were. Why? Not because he was morbid or melancholy, for he looked for a City which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God, but this world would never be the same again with Mother gone.

Robb had spent two or three weeks in the spring with Mother. He thought she must have had a premonition of her death then. She hardly let him out of her sight. She followed him from room to room, caressed him, kissed him, tried to tell him how much he meant to her.

Now, there he sat, and they were telling him about Mother's death.

"Robb," Frances and Father were both talking at once, "Robb, the electric lights in the room seemed dim in comparison to the glory that was scintillating around her bed. She beckoned with her hands and looked over there -- to the land where she was going." Surely, thought Robb, when a saint comes home, the saints already there gather together, and heaven in full array comes to welcome that one.

It seemed Robb's heart was torn to pieces. Then he got to thinking, I'll see my mother again -- on the banks of the River of Life. I'll see Jesus -- the One I want to see first!

The next time Robb was to see Mother, she was in her casket. He walked up and looked at that arm that had enfolded him so tenderly, lying across her breast. Those eyes that had looked so lovingly into his were closed.

"Mother," Robb spoke softly, "thank you for leading the way. Thank you for your prayer life."

It wasn't that she had gotten up in the night and tiptoed to his room to put another blanket on him. It wasn't that she had taken food from her own mouth to give to him. It wasn't that she had sat up in the night when it was dark, when she should have been in bed, to mend his clothes. It was her prayers Robb remembered. Mother, I thank you for your prayers.

Mother had always been so solicitous. Just a little whimper and she had been by his bedside. "What do you want? What's wrong?"

Now they stood by her casket, crying and weeping. But she lay perfectly oblivious.

That isn't like my mother, Robb thought. Why can't she open her lips and eyes and say, "What's wrong, Robb?"

Yes, Robb remembered all her loving ways. He appreciated them all. But now all that was fading away. It was her prayers that had influenced him so profoundly. Mother, I thank you for your prayers!

As they planned the funeral, Robb said to Father, "Father, Mother was an old-fashioned, shouting pilgrim. She didn't believe in ceremony and form. I wish we'd -- let's have an informal service where the preacher can feel free to preach the truth."

"Well, let's pray about it, Robb. Let's pray."

As it turned out, when Rev. Scott arose to preach, he forgot himself and preached as though he were delivering an evangelistic sermon. Finally, he stopped and said, "I almost believe I'll give an altar call."

"Do it, Brother Scott," Robb said. "That's what my mother would want."

They all gathered around the casket and Father led in prayer. What a time they had! Heaven came down. They shouted. They rejoiced. Just then Robb noticed the undertaker in the rear. Doubtless he was anxious to get this funeral over with. They might even have another funeral that same afternoon, and it was already late.

Robb went back to him. "O sir, I'm sorry," he said. "We're presuming on you."

"What do you mean?"

"My, my, we've been here so long."

"Never mind -- never mind," he said. "This is all right. Seldom can we undertakers say we enjoy a funeral, but we're enjoying this. Just carry it along."

When the procession arrived at the cemetery, they had another shouting time. Robb and Geraldine sang a special song. Father got blessed. The sun was going down now, and Robb thought surely the undertaker would be impatient by this time. He slipped over to him.

"Brother, I'm sorry we've been so thoughtless here," Robb apologized. "We've taken so much time."

"Say," the undertaker stopped him, "haven't you got something else you can do? We'd like to stick around here awhile. This is all right."

"Hallelujah!" Robb said to himself. "This old-fashioned salvation works in life or in the cemetery!"

Mother's death brought back a deluge of memories sweeping now across Robb's mind. Many a time he had seen God come upon that woman. From her lips he had heard eloquence he had heard nowhere else. She used language beyond her comprehension. It was the Holy Ghost taking a frail, little woman and breathing out a message.

One of the pastors in a pioneer church in Oregon often had Mother in his audience. One evening he entered his church to find a goodly number assembled. Now, he thought to himself, we've got this place full of outsiders. If Mother French doesn't come and have one of those spells, we're going to have a glorious service tonight, and possibly win some souls to Christ.

"Lord," he prayed, "don't let Mother French come. Don't let her come."

But she came. She came down and took the front seat.

The preacher thought, I know what I'll do. She's kind of hard of hearing. I'll just preach in kind of a whisper. That way she won't hear me and won't have anything to shout about.

But the fire touched Mother's heart and she couldn't keep still. Up she got, and praised the Lord.

She shouted and cried. When she sat down, the preacher gave the altar call, and nearly every sinner in that house came to the altar and knelt. Never had he seen such an altar service. They prayed through and popped up like popcorn.

When they all stood up to celebrate the victory, the preacher said, "Now, I want you to tell me what struck your heart. What was it I said?"

They looked at him and he looked at them. Finally, one said, "We hate to tell you, Brother, we did not hear a thing you said, but when Mother French got up there and shouted around, we saw something in her face that made us hungry. Hallelujah!"

In later years, Robb said, "I guess I'm getting old, and I give way to my feelings sometimes, but I want to be like my mother. She was more earnest in her old age than she was when she was young. Even when the weather was bad, she found her way to the house of God. 'O Mother,' we'd say, 'you shouldn't go tonight. It's a rainy night. You have that cough. It's chilly out there.' But she would brush us aside. 'But I've got to go, Robb,' she'd say. 'There's something about it -- when the church bell rings, I've got to go. My candle is burning out. I've got to make these last moments count for God.'

Thank God for her memory. I don't want to get careless and blame it on my age or on my sickness. I want to keep the fire burning brightly on the altar of my heart. I don't want to be surprised and ashamed when the Lord comes.

"Yes, thank you, Mother," Robb said again and again, "that you stepped out and took the lead and suffered persecution. We're all following in your footsteps. We'll meet you on the banks of sweet deliverance."

At one time, John Clement, when introducing Robb French at a camp meeting, referred to the Frenches as a strange outfit "It takes them half the morning to have morning prayer and half the night to have evening prayer."

"That was stretching it a little bit," Robb commented, "but it was true that no matter how long it took, Mother would say, 'We're going to have the fire.' And we did. If you were to ask me, 'Brother French, what was the greatest service you were ever in?' I think I would have to answer, 'Family worship.' That's where I got saved. 'Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight. Make me a child again just for tonight.'

"I remember, Mother once had us children gathered together in a little attic room upstairs, and she was sobbing. The tears splashed to the floor. Oh, she was weeping convulsively. 'Children,' she said, 'children, if you're lost, could you blame me? Have I done my best?' There was silence except for Mother's weeping. Finally my brother broke the silence and said, 'No, Mother, we couldn't blame you. You have done your best.'

"When I was a growing boy, I thought I could out-talk my mother. But I tell you, when hot tears fell on me -- that was too much. She'd stand over my bed and weep -- a weeping mother! Thank you, Mother. Thank you."

Some time after Mother's passing, Father, Frances, Will and his family, all returned to Alabama, Father held his last pastorate at Fairview Church, Cottdale, Alabama, when he was eighty-four years of age. When he died in August of 1940, Robb was at his bedside. Kneeling there, Robb's mind went back to Denver, Colorado, where Father said that last "yes" to God. "Praise God!" Robb whispered. "He's going home today to live in a mansion that would make the White House look like a dog house. No comparison. It pays to serve Jesus. It pays to obey Him."

Will and his family entered the evangelistic field. The Lord wonderfully blessed their work and gave them some glorious revivals. Will insisted on taking his entire family with him. It was quite a problem, as for a time he had three and, some time later, four more children, but the wisdom of the plan was evident when at last all his family of four boys and three girls were saved and established in some kind of service for the Lord.

After returning to Alabama and pastoring there for seven years, Will was called to pastor the college church in Central, South Carolina, in 1944. His responsibilities eventually took in the pastoring of four churches in the area. It was here that a heart attack caused his doctor to urge Will to slow down. But Will was energetic and untiring, always busy. It was not easy for him to adapt himself to his limitations.

One day while making improvements around his home, he needed sand. It was February 15, 1953. He took two of his sons, Ward (15) and Larry (10), and went down to a sand bank by the river. In their maneuvering, the car chugged down in the sand and stuck. All three were pushing and working to free it, when Will said, "I believe I'll have to rest awhile." He sat in the car a short time when Ward noticed that he looked rather strange. The lad spoke to his father, but there was no answer.

Will was dead.

A life of Spirit-filled ministry was now spent -- a life whose influence, however, lives on in the hearts of the multitudes he led to Jesus, and in the lives of his dedicated family.

Quotes from H. Robb French

It's a death route. You die to self, you die to sin, you die to reputation, you die to people, you die to money, you die to the future, you die to your family, you die to everything. That's consecration! If you've ever been to the altar of consecration, everything you have or ever expect to have is just a pile of ashes.

It's good for us once in a while to plunge out in faith beyond our depth. If Elijah had had a bank account and a pantry full of groceries and a bin full of potatoes, the ravens wouldn't have had to feed him. Wouldn't you just like sometime to have a brook-of-Cherith experience? Here comes a raven down out of heaven giving me my breakfast...

I have to be rigidly systematic in my prayer life. I can preach three times a day and backslide.

People get put out with me and think I wrote the Bible. The Bible says, "Without holiness no man

shall see the Lord." I didn't write that. How much religion will it take to get you to heaven? Just enough to make you feel comfortable in the presence of God.

Dead to this world. Do you know what that word "dead" means in the Greek? It means "dead." Do you know what it means in French? "Dead." When you're dead, you're dead! Dead to self, to position, to future ambitions. How we act under pressure tells whether we're dead or not. How do you act when you can't have your own way? When someone else gets the credit for what you've done?

This blessed experience of full salvation -- it doesn't sour, it doesn't ferment. And God wants to prove it to the world by putting the pressure on.

A rich man came into a little holiness church and listened to the special music. The Frenches were the singers. "Why, that's wonderful! You've got talent here," the man exclaimed. "If you'd trim the corners and not be so radical, you'd go to town." "But we don't care about going to town," Robb soliloquized, we're going to the City."

There comes a time when the Spirit no longer strives with a soul. If that soul ever gets to God, he will have to act on what he knows whether he has a speck of feeling or not. The prodigal said, "I will arise." He put his will into it. You take the initiative. You take the lead. Draw nigh to God and He'll draw nigh to you.

Why do we have to go the narrow way? We don't have to. There's a broad way. The only trouble is, it ends up in the wrong place.

It's a sad thing that the Church of Jesus Christ has no casualty list. No one today is dying for the cause of Christ.

In some of our theological institutions they're saying, "Don't stir up opposition." Aren't you glad John the Baptist didn't attend some of our modern theological cemeteries? He lost his head; but, brother, he's wearing a crown. The thing I'm worrying about is whether some of us fellows that keep our heads will get a crown or not.

We'll have to travel the steep road to Calvary to be qualified to be in the select company who will be going up in the Rapture.

"Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged." Do you know what the word is there? Overloaded. Did you ever see a great plane roll down the runway and not be able to take off? Too much baggage -- too heavily loaded. Now, if Jesus Christ should come this morning, how many of us would miss it because we're too heavily loaded? How sad if our thoughts should be so full of things and plans and this and that, that we wouldn't be able to get into the air!

If you're ready to live, you're ready to die; if you're ready to die, you're ready to live.

I wish they had a museum somewhere with Daniel's backbone in it. I'd go sometimes and see it. When I feel a little wobbly, I'd go and see it.

Don't you think Jesus Christ can't take an insult! He knows when we stay at home on prayer meeting night.

You parents won't win your children by compromising. You teach them to kowtow and they'll bow to the anti-Christ.

Every child of God is a soldier. I wish I could say it with such emphasis it would scorch your very brain and heart. From the least to the greatest, from the youngest to the oldest, from the lowest to the highest, we are soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Will prayed gas into his carburetor when he didn't have any in the tank. You say, "I don't believe that." Well, you can try it out. You can't do it with money in your pocket, though. I'm not saying anything new. You know my position. We have insurance. We have social security. We have everything provided for us. We have plenty. We don't need to trust God. Faith dries up on our hands. Let's step over into the supernatural!

I'm a chicken-hearted fellow. I ride through the country and see the corn growing tall. Comes a flood, and I begin to pray, "Lord, stop the flood." See a hurricane coming- "Lord . Maybe I've been praying wrong. America's ripe for the judgments of God. The two things the modern church needs today are poverty and persecution.

I'm going down the western side of the hill, brother, and I'm interested in getting old. I want to know if this experience of perfect love will keep one when he gets tottery and decrepit. I believe it will! Hallelujah! I don't believe you have to get childish. I don't believe you have to get irritable and cross. I believe you can still have the victory in your heart. (Lord, when I near the sunset, keep the fires of heavenly love burning red-hot in my soul!)



BACK COVER TEXT

What are the hidden springs behind a life of power? This book reveals the early influences of divine grace working through a godly family.

Saved at the age of six and called to preach in his teens, H. Robb French became a pioneer of new churches, a prophet calling the Body of Christ back to a revival of holiness and power, and an intercessor at the throne of grace. His life theme was "Christ."

He founded Florida Evangelical Association which sponsored or assisted in the establishment of Sea Breeze Camp, Hobe Sound Bible College, FEA Missions, Sea Breeze Manor, a Gospel literature ministry, and other auxiliary enterprises which would reach thousands world wide.

Anna Talbott McPherson gleaned information for this book from sermon tapes, letters and interviews.

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