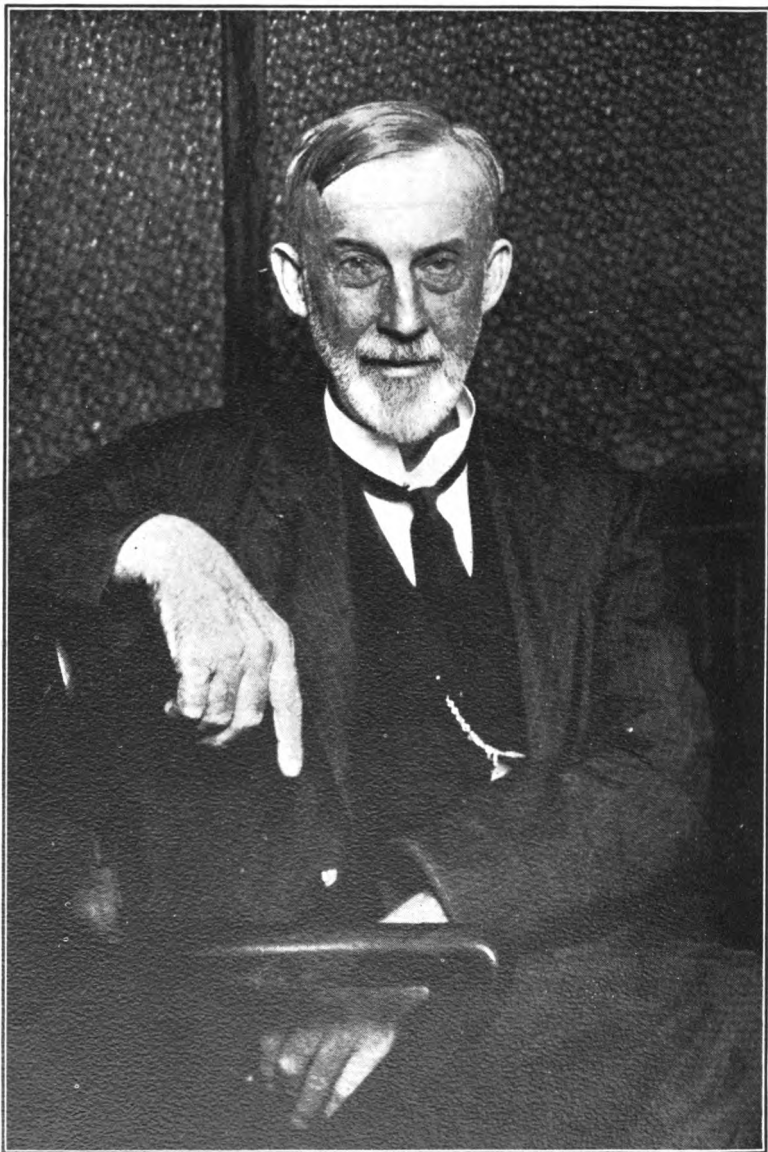


RELIGION IN SHOES



REV. JAMES ALEXANDER BRYAN, D.D.

Pastor Third Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama

RELIGION IN SHOES

Brother Bryan of Birmingham

BY
HUNTER B. BLAKELY



With an Introduction by
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TO
MRS. JAMES ALEXANDER BRYAN
THE QUEEN OF A HOME
AND
HELPMET OF A VERY HUMAN SAINT

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

THE information for the first edition of this story was gathered largely during a vacation in August 1931 which the author spent with Brother Bryan in his own Birmingham. Now for a long time the little book has been out of print, and many requests have been coming, from near and far, for it to appear again. Twenty years later, on vacation in the beautiful mountains of Virginia, I have tried to recapture something of the spiritual thrill which came from keeping company for a short period with this saint of God. Again, the family graciously has furnished me with material for the chapter on the last ten years of his life. At first I thought there should be a complete revision, changing present tenses into past. But in reading over what had been put down years before, there seemed such a freshness which had come from the immediate companionship that the decision was soon made to add only a few pages to tell of this life at "The Sunset Time." Again this little volume is sent into the even more troubled and perplexed world to tell the story of a life glorified in Jesus Christ.

THE AUTHOR

Richmond, Virginia
August 29, 1951

PREFACE

FROM THE PAST, out of a storybook, comes the tale of one who thought not of his own food or raiment or pleasure, but went from door to door, carrying the Gospel of love to the sin-laden and the brokenhearted. Once in the slums of a great city, surrounded by poverty and squalor, he knocked gently on a humble door and heard a distant voice from the washtub say: "'Gwan an' open the door, Sally, an' see who it is."

And Sally, little freckled-faced, barefoot urchin, pulling up her stockings full of holes, hastily arranging her worn little frock, and pushing back some straying locks of her tousled red hair, opened the door and seeing the beloved preacher standing there called back to her mother: "Please, ma'am, it's religion come to see us."

From the twentieth century comes the story of "RELIGION IN SHOES," in the person of Brother Bryan of Birmingham, who for more than forty years walked the streets of that great industrial city, ministering in the name of Jesus Christ to high and low, to gambler, drunkard, prostitute, and to those who by the grace of God had been kept from flagrant sin. The ministry of "RELIGION IN SHOES" was not tied by the distinctions of race or creed, but with a love which was inclusive and with a sympathy which found no boundaries it blessed all. The reason for this book is the uniqueness of the story of this man, who sincerely followed Jesus.

The information for the preparation of "RELIGION IN SHOES" was obtained through the co-operation of the members of the family of Rev. J. A. Bryan, D.D., through interviews with scores of his friends in the city of Birmingham, by use of newspaper clippings, especially those from the *Birmingham News* and the

Birmingham Post, and by a vacation period spent in his constant company. Two stories in this book have appeared previously in Dr. William L. Stidger's book, *Men of the Great Redemption*, in the chapter "Brother Bryan of Birmingham," but each of these stories was repeated to the author in Birmingham independently of the account given by Dr. Stidger. To the best knowledge of the author, no other material in this volume has appeared in book form. To the friends of Brother Bryan the author wishes to express his appreciation for all the valuable help given in the preparation of this volume. The author's thanks go especially to Mrs. Bryan and the children, and to the son, Rev. Harry H. Bryan, in particular, for invaluable assistance.

THE AUTHOR

Staunton, Virginia

March 5, 1934

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INTRODUCTION

HERE is a book that cuts across creed, race, and barriers of every sort. It has its message and its appeal for every man who feels his kinship with men. It is one of the finest human interest documents I have ever seen.

Some will be tempted to say that St. Francis of Assisi has donned stiff-soled shoes and walked the streets and byways of Birmingham. The two saints are akin; each for his day and generation has succeeded above others in showing Christ to his fellow men.

We have many biographies of American churchmen whose lives have influenced Church councils, shaped Church polity and policy, and created educational, promotional, and missionary institutions. This is not such a biography. If Brother Bryan ever attended Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly you would never discern it from these pages. What his views were on questions which shook the Church and nation, no one will ever know. But as we read we do know how God keeps covenant with one who casts all care upon Him, how the cup of cold water given in the Master's name is blessed, and how the "inasmuch as" doctrine interpreted into life brings forth its fruit even before the Son of Man appears in the clouds of glory with His holy angels.

Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief, pass through its pages with their sisters, wives, daughters, and mothers, always in company with Brother Bryan, helped by or helping him. As I read I often chuckled, but more often found a smile upon my lips and tears in my eyes. You, too, will read it with a smile and a tear and be a better man for having read.

BEN R. LACY, JR.

CHAPTER ONE
THE MAKING OF THE MAN

I

DO YOU know Brother Bryan? No..... Then you do not live in Birmingham, Alabama, for everyone in that great industrial city knows Brother Bryan. His stooped shoulders, Christlike face, and gentle voice are the best known in all the city. He is pastor of about the smallest church in Birmingham, but his parish is by far the largest. Among all the ministers he has had the longest pastorate, for this year will round out forty-five years of service in one church. If you look in the denominational year book, you will find him listed as pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church, but all these years his church has been more or less a tethering post, allowing him to roam over the whole city in the service of Christ.

About statistics or bookkeeping he knows nothing, but since in Birmingham he makes good print, a newspaper some years ago put a reporter out to estimate in figures the reach of his ministry. After many hours spent over church, county, and city records, the reporter wrote for the *Birmingham Post* on November 5, 1926, the following estimate of Brother Bryan's thirty-seven years and five months pastorate: "He has

married 4,589 couples
officiated at 7,926 funerals
preached 49,120 times
led 7,627 to a profession of faith in Jesus Christ."

This was eight years ago and in these last years Brother Bryan has been busier than ever before. No accurate record has ever been kept, except that on September 15, 1921, Mrs. Bryan began

to keep a careful record of all marriages and from that time to this he has officiated at 2,811 weddings. The reporter was probably not far wrong, for the weddings for the last twelve years number more than half of the estimated number for the first thirty-seven years.

Many years ago when a slim lad came to preach in Birmingham, he was "Mr. Bryan"; as the years passed an honorary title was prefixed and they called him "Doctor"; but this was many years ago, for long since the "Mister" and the "Doctor" have gone into discard and for the multitudes in and around Birmingham he is "Brother Bryan." It was his own way of speaking to others. Christ had made all men, white and black, native born and immigrant, poor and rich, his brothers. He called them all "Brother," and men realizing how truly he meant it fastened the name "Brother" to him. He is "Brother Bryan of Birmingham," the brother beloved of all.

II

WHERE originated this unique character, this Brother Bryan of Birmingham, the man who represents "Religion in Shoes" of service?

James Alexander Bryan was born near Kingstree in lower South Carolina on March 20, 1863. Two years before, the American Civil War had begun with the firing on Fort Sumter, fifty miles to the south. He was a child of those fearful years of fratricidal strife and his early youth came in that even more tragic period of reconstruction. His life was to be given in love to his fellow men; and in those early years he knew from bitter experience the meaning of suffering, want, and hunger. In all of the United States no section suffered more from the war than Bryan's native state of South Carolina.

His ancestors were they who knew the bitter side of life; for two generations before on the paternal side they had left their Irish homes to escape persecution and to find religious freedom in the new world. At about the same period his mother's forebears

for the same reason had come to the new world from Scotland. On both sides there was that rugged Presbyterian strain which valued a religious heritage enough to suffer for it. The father, Robert R. Bryan, was from Greene County, North Carolina, while the mother was Miss Mary Savage, of Nansemond County, Virginia. In later years Brother Bryan has often said that the greatest legacy he ever received, outside the redemption of Jesus Christ — the ground of his acceptance before God — was the heritage from Christian parents.

His birth took place while his father was following Lee in Virginia, and at the close of the long struggle the little family lived in eastern South Carolina. In the home of the soldier father and godly mother, the Bible was the chief and almost the only book. The after-war years in that stricken state were times of poverty. There were no luxuries, for one did well to maintain the bare necessities of life. The father labored on his farm to provide the frugal living and the mother was housekeeper and teacher for her little home. Religion was not neglected in that Southern home. Morning and evening the family gathered to sing a psalm or hymn, to hear a passage from the Holy Writ, and to kneel in thankful prayer. The children were taught to keep the Sabbath in the strict Presbyterian way, and the Bryan family were most regular attendants at the village church. The guidance of those early days cast its blessed shadow over all the after years.

When times had become somewhat easier, the neighbors banded together to employ a teacher for their children. A little school was started with a Miss Susan Keels as teacher. The ordinary subjects of the time were taught: spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic, with two afternoon periods each week devoted to the study of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. After several years a public school was established with a college graduate as teacher. Tramping across the swamp each day to school, little Jimmy Bryan struggled for an education. The public school term was so short that a private school for a few months in the summer was maintained by those families most interested in the education of their children. So meager had been his school opportunities that

when he was fourteen years of age he had not quite finished the lower grades.

III

IN 1877 the fourteen-year-old boy was sent to live with his father's sister in Raleigh, the capital of North Carolina. Here was located Lovejoy Academy, where the boy would have a far better chance of securing an education than in the struggling schools near his home in South Carolina. His three years at Lovejoy Academy were eventful years. That quest for knowledge came which led the struggling lad through nine further years of work and study, until he had fitted himself in the best possible way for his chosen calling.

But the greater influence of the years in Raleigh was that here he pledged publicly his allegiance to Jesus Christ, whom from that day he has unswervingly followed for more than half a century. Many influences had led him to a decision for Christ, not least of which were his godly parentage and the religious atmosphere of the parental home. Many sermons and preachers of his boyhood days he still remembers. His life seems always to have been religiously inclined, with the heavenward doors of his soul swinging continually open. One minister who made a deep impression upon young Bryan was later to attain international fame, Rev. H. C. DuBose, who as a missionary in China exerted a far-reaching influence in obtaining the prohibition of the deadly traffic in opium. While Mr. DuBose was a student at Columbia Theological Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina, he supplied during a summer vacation Bryan's home church. The impression of this consecrated young man upon the youthful Bryan was lasting. At Raleigh young Bryan began immediately to attend the First Presbyterian Church, where the preaching of the pastor, Dr. John S. Watkins, showed to him clearly the meaning of the Christian life.

It was the consecrated superintendent of the Sunday school, Mr. Leo D. Heartt, however, who led him to a definite decision for Christ. After prayer in the Sunday school, Mr. Heartt ap-

THE MAKING OF THE MAN

proached the young man and asked him if he were not ready to take a stand for Christ and the church. Young Bryan was not only ready but eager to do so, and on the next Sunday, October, 1877, he publicly confessed his faith in the Saviour, was baptized and received into the church. From the beginning he was a faithful church member, a regular attendant at the Sunday services and the Wednesday evening prayer meetings, and always willing to render any possible service.

IV

SHORTLY before he completed his studies at Lovejoy Academy, a scholarship made it possible for him to go to the University of North Carolina. He entered the University in January, 1880, and for four years studied there, as he says, "amid trials, temptations, triumphs, and lack of money." In the day before athletics held so completely the interest of undergraduates, the literary societies were centers of much student activity. Young Bryan was a member of the Philanthropic Literary Society and here found abundant opportunity to develop his talent in public speaking. A high standard was set in those days in literary society work, for from the Philanthropic Literary Society of that day came Edwin A. Alderman, who became the President of the University of Virginia, one of the most gifted orators of his generation. Two notices in the history of the University of North Carolina tell of Bryan's literary activities and also of the development of the spiritual and intellectual man. "At 8 P.M., on June 6, 1883, before a large audience, representatives of the two literary societies delivered original orations — J. A. Bryan on 'Benefits of Organized Charity,'" and at the commencement celebration of his society in June, 1885, his final college address was on "The Victories of Christianity."

One night, while he was studying law with another student, the door opened and a telegraph messenger stood in the door with a message in his hand. Nervously the young student opened it and read, "Father is very sick. — Mother." He hurried to the train, and asked the conductor to look for a message at the next

stop. Soon the kind-hearted conductor sat down in the seat with him and opening a message read, "My son, your father is dead. Come home at once." He reached home to find his mother standing in the door to meet him and she said, "Son, you did not get home in time. We had to bury your father yesterday. At the grave they sang, 'Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.'" Looking back across the years, Brother Bryan's comment is, "Christ was there seeking me."

Somehow the brave mother was able to hold the little family together while the son finished his university course. At the commencement of 1885 all the work was completed. His college days were over and Bryan received his diploma with the degree of Bachelor of Science. His funds were now completely exhausted, so, borrowing enough money to pay for his diploma and to buy a railroad ticket, he started home.

V

BUT it was to a widowed mother young Bryan returned. Since his father's death the mother with her younger children had moved to Spartanburg, South Carolina. The future of the young graduate was now complicated by the problem of helping to provide for the fatherless home.

Two callings appealed to the young man, the law and the ministry. Before his father's death, young Bryan had talked of his future plans with his invalid father. He told him that he was considering the legal profession as a lifework. His father said, "I don't want you to study law, I want you to preach." That night Brother Bryan heard his father pray from his sickbed that God would direct his son into the ministry. Many influences led him to turn from the law to enter the Gospel ministry, but the decision was made soon after he met the Rev. George Summey, who asked the young man definitely to decide to be a preacher. Mr. Summey was the only man, except his father, to urge upon him the call to preach the Gospel. Not long after his talk with Mr. Summey, Bryan's decision was made. He was to be a preacher.

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The way was not yet open to continue his studies in a school of theology, for some provision in the meantime must be made for the widowed mother and younger children. In July, 1885, he secured a position as instructor in the Gastonia Female Institute, Gastonia, North Carolina. Here he spent a year teaching the young ladies from the wealthier homes of Gaston County. At the end of the year there was nothing saved toward the course in theology, for his salary had been used on the family at home. Unexpectedly, through the interest of a minister, a way was opened to a theological education. A scholarship, sufficient to meet the bare expenses of living, was offered from Princeton Theological Seminary.

VI

WITH \$1.85 in his pocket young Bryan arrived at Princeton in September, 1886, to begin his theological course. The three years at Princeton were a great experience for the young man from South Carolina. At that time Princeton was in her glory with such stalwart intellectuals as Dr. William H. Green, Dr. Casper Wistar Hodge, Dr. Francis L. Patton, Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield, Dr. John D. Davis, and others upon her faculty. The piety of the slim young Southerner brought to him the name "The Saint," which after years proved to have been well placed. The characteristics so marked in later years began to express themselves in these seminary days. Writing forty-five years afterward, one of his seminary friends said, "I always felt that he was a modern St. Francis of Assisi. His Christlike spirit and his untiring devotion to his Master in the service of His children have been an inspiration to me always." His recreation during these wonderful days was long walks with student friends along the beautiful roads leading into the country from Princeton, and on these long walks young Bryan revealed his deep spiritual nature to his intimate friends.

During his seminary days he did not supply many nearby pulpits, but quite characteristically turned to the Negroes of

Princeton for a field of service. He taught down on Witherspoon Street a Negro Sunday school class and frequently was asked to lead their Wednesday prayer service. Here among his colored friends he was at home. He understood the Negro, for out in the cotton fields of South Carolina he had with hoe and plow labored along with them. Forty years later when his class gathered for the fortieth reunion he could not endure a week without preaching, and, slipping away from the class festivities, he went down to the little Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church for colored people and delivered a lengthy sermon on the experience of a recent journey to the Holy Land.

His first year in the seminary showed clearly that he had made no mistake in entering the ministry. Years later he said, "I loved the professors and I loved my studies." At the end of the first seminary year Bryan was invited to supply the little Presbyterian church at Hendersonville, North Carolina. This was a summer resort, frequented by many prominent people, who came to enjoy the salubrious air of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Many of these summer residents came to the Presbyterian chapel and young Bryan formed some lasting friendships. Through one of these friends there came into his life an enduring influence. A vestryman of an Episcopal church of Charleston, South Carolina, worshiped frequently with the Presbyterians while spending a vacation in the mountains, and took much interest in the young preacher. One day at the close of the service he spoke to the minister, saying that he wished, when he returned to Charleston, to send a book which might prove helpful to a young preacher. Shortly after Bryan returned to Princeton in September the book arrived, *The Life of Trust*, by George Müller. This book, which told how one might trust God for everything, made a profound impression upon young Bryan. As he read again and again that story of how George Müller put the life of trust into practice and discovered that God would provide, young Bryan resolved one day in old Alexander Hall at Princeton that he, too, would venture on the life of absolute trust in God, and, quietly falling on his knees, he rededicated his life to Christ, promising that

from that day he would trust Him for everything; now for more than half a century he has, and God has never failed.

Shortly before the end of his second seminary year, an invitation came to spend the summer months as supply of a little Presbyterian church in the new industrial city of Birmingham, Alabama. Some time before this a little church had been organized in a tent at the corner of Avenue G and 23rd Street, with thirty members. The little congregation had finally erected a small wooden building, but since its organization in 1884 it had never had a pastor. The preaching had been done by pulpit supplies and by faithful ministers of other Presbyterian churches in and around Birmingham, who gave such time as they found possible to aid the struggling new congregation. Young Bryan took up the work as summer supply on July 5, 1888. His first sermon was from the text, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke 19:10. The young preacher did his best during those summer months, but nothing of especial interest comes down to us from that summer.

Soon he was back for the last year in Princeton. He was now at home in this university center and the last year was the best of all. Like other young men he was wondering where God would now use him. Two calls came, one from that struggling little church in industrial Birmingham and one to become assistant in a large church in Philadelphia. He scarcely knew where God would have him serve. He wrote, "I had spent a long time in prayer, heart-searching, self-examination, and earnest consideration, before the souls of these people in a town destined to be a southern Pittsburgh rolled over my heart and life." Before graduation day he had decided. He would go to Birmingham, Alabama.

CHAPTER TWO

BRYAN GROWS UP WITH BIRMINGHAM

I

WHEN young Bryan came to Birmingham, this industrial city of the southeastern United States was an infant in swaddling clothes. In 1871 a discarded railroad freight car marked the spot where now stands the city of more than a quarter of a million inhabitants. In the years following the War Between the States, railroads were penetrating the undeveloped South and one of these roads had passed along through Jones Valley in north-central Alabama. Another railroad was projected to run due north and south, from the capital, Montgomery, to the Tennessee line at Decatur. This line would cross the other railroad somewhere in this valley. To take advantage of the railroad junction, some enterprising men organized the Elyton Land Company, purchased a large tract of land in Jones Valley, and in January, 1871, decided to build a city, which should be called "Birmingham," after the great industrial city of England. These men were gifted with splendid vision, for few cities have been so advantageously situated. Perhaps in no spot upon the globe had nature hidden such abundant natural resources as in the mountainsides along the sixty-five-mile stretch of Jones Valley, and the valley itself, six miles wide, formed an ideal place for the location of great industries, with the mountains rising on each side to provide cool and magnificent building sites for future homes. Nature had destined the spot for the location of a great city.

One marvels at the mineral wealth concentrated here; their great diversity, their almost inexhaustible quantity, and their splendid quality and close proximity to one another. It is said to be the only place on the globe where all the materials and

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properties used in the fluxing of steel can be found within a few yards of one another. The minerals and their substantives have been listed as follows: coal, coke, iron ore, pig iron, clay, stone, cement, lime, graphite, barytes, bauxite, mill stones, mineral waters, sand, gravel, copper, gold, quartz, and pyrite. Out from this valley stretched the vast cotton fields of the South and great forests, as yet in 1871 almost untouched.

Sixty years later Jones Valley had been transformed. A great industrial city stretched along almost its entire length. At night great steel furnaces lighted up the heavens. Six hundred and ninety-six manufacturing plants and mining companies were doing business in Birmingham and vicinity, and the factories and mines produced almost two thousand varied products, valued annually somewhere around a quarter of a billion dollars. On the mountains around the city were beautiful residential districts. Birmingham has been called the "magic" city of the South, for in half a century she arose from a struggling village to a great city.

A rare vision was permitted to this young man, twenty-six years of age and about to graduate from Princeton Seminary, when he accepted the call to the congregation of thirty-seven members in the new town of the Southeast, but he had a premonition that Birmingham was to become the "Pittsburgh of the South." The dream came true and Bryan saw the development of a great city.

II

ON June 1, 1889, a slim, delicate young man, whom many of his friends thought would not last long in the strenuous work of the ministry, stepped from the train to the platform of the station at Birmingham. Brother Bryan had arrived to grow up with Birmingham.

"I shall never forget the day I arrived in Birmingham, fresh from Princeton Seminary, to take up my duties," Brother Bryan declares. "The streets were almost deserted when I stepped from the train at six o'clock in the morning and I climbed in an old hack and ordered the driver to take me to Major Thompson's,

where I was to stay. Only one person called to welcome me and wish me luck during the entire day, but I was not dismayed and set about preparing my first sermon."

Forty years later it is interesting to ride around the city with the preacher who grew up with Birmingham. He lived so much out of doors, as he walked from place to place where they did not have a minister, that he grew strong and disproved all predictions of his early death. No one can point out better than he the transformations of the Valley. "Do you see that big building?" he asks. "It is the Protective Insurance Company. On the fourteenth floor is the radio studio, where I broadcast each Saturday morning. Well, forty-two years ago that spot was a potato patch, and across the street, where the big bank building rises, was a little blacksmith shop."

He can tell you of how in these early days the streets were unpaved, of how when it rained the wagons would sink down to the hubs in mud, of how ox carts traveled slowly along streets where now a horse-drawn vehicle has become almost a novelty, and he can describe the mule cars for you. "There were two mule car lines here in 1889. One of them ran straight out Twentieth Street and the other by the old rolling mill. You know it was too funny. When the mule car got to the foot of Twentieth Street hill they hitched another mule on the front. All the men got off and walked up and the ladies sat still and rode. When they reached the top, the men got on again, and the car went on as far as Five Points; then the third mule was taken off, and the other two mules were switched to the other end, and down the hill they trotted, with that third mule running along loose. They had a man at the bottom of the hill to catch the third mule, and the animal stayed there all day, eating oats and pulling the cars up the hill!"

The great churches of Birmingham were then very small. The First Methodist Church, today with 3,000 members, then occupied a little brick building. Where the chimes of the First Presbyterian Church ring out across downtown Birmingham, there stood a little pine plank structure. The First Baptist

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Church was struggling for a foothold in the new city which iron was building. Little missions were just starting around the new steel mills, many of which have grown into important churches. It was to a very small wooden structure that young Bryan came as minister in 1889. In an after-dinner speech years later, Brother Bryan said to the businessmen of the city, "You gentlemen came to Birmingham and invested your dollars, but when the speaker came and stepped off the train he had nothing to invest but his life and his love."

Indeed he did have love, Christ-empowered love, freely received and freely given. "I loved this city from the first and still love it. It is almost wicked to love a place like I love Birmingham," is his comment today.

III

THE young man began his ministry with a funeral. It was the third grave in the new cemetery. Today there are some twelve thousand graves clustered in that burying ground, and according to one of the older undertakers, "he must have stood by the open grave of at least one-half of that number." His mission to Birmingham was to comfort those who mourn, to preach good tidings to the meek and breaking of bonds to many poor souls bound in sin. A few incidents from those early days best explain how Bryan won the heart of Birmingham.

The young preacher was leading services during a week of prayer in the little Y.M.C.A., located over the Western Union Telegraph office on First Avenue. He and other earnest Christians were giving out invitations everywhere, in the saloons, on the streets, to all classes of men. As young Bryan came down the steps after the service one day, a man stood by the door with an ugly gash in his nose and a blood-stained face. The young preacher took his hand and invited him to the prayer meeting. Lifting his finger to the ugly wound, the man said, "This wound and this blood on my face came from a pistol shot. I shot myself a while ago in a dark room. The bullet only grazed my face. It sobered me and I am still here." Young Bryan got the man

into the prayer room and knelt with him to pray. The next day he was back at noon and attended the evening service. Christ came into his heart and from that day he was a saved man. Later Bryan learned his story. He was a member of one of the first families of old Virginia, but drink, unemployment, and sin had gotten the best of him. At last it was a suicide's shot, a new friend kneeling beside him, and then — God.

One day this young preacher approached a stalwart policeman managing the traffic. "Are you a Christian, brother?" asked the youthful minister. "No," replied the officer, and then Bryan prayed. The man came to church, confessed Christ, and afterwards, until his life was sacrificed in his line of duty as a policeman, he gave his life in the dark alleys, red-light districts, and wherever God might lead him as a personal worker for the Christ who saves.

It was late at night. The young preacher was in bed. There were no telephones in those days. A voice from the street was calling the minister. It was a policeman. Would the preacher come and see his dying boy? The preacher slipped into his clothes, hurried down, and went home with the policeman. The lad was desperately ill with tuberculosis. They thought he was dying that night. The boy was struggling for a Saviour. The preacher knelt and prayed with the sick boy and told him of the Saviour Jesus. But the boy did not die that night. He lived on for two months. Each day the preacher came to talk and pray. Finally the lad found Jesus. Great joy was in his soul. The father and mother of the dying boy were at bitter enmity. One night at midnight the father came in off his beat and the boy called his father and mother into the little room where he now lay dying. With his skinny arms he drew the two down over his emaciated body and whispered, "Mother and father, I want you to kiss across my dying body. I am dying to reconcile you to each other." Across the dying body of their son the estranged father and mother were reconciled to one another, and from that day began the change which at last reconciled both to their Father God through Jesus Christ.

BRYAN GROWS UP WITH BIRMINGHAM

On a cold rainy night the young minister gave his invitation to remain for prayer. He hurried to the door to speak to all strangers. When he came back, sitting by the stove was a human derelict warming his bloodless body. The minister asked him where he lived, but shame kept the man from an answer. He told the preacher of his family, wife and children, of their need and his. They prayed together, a little material help was given, and the man went away. In some way the minister discovered where he lived and going there found a bare room, the children shivering in their clothes, and a brokenhearted wife. It was the old story of drink and dissipation. The man came back to the little study and after a while gave his life to the Saviour. Everything was changed. His mind was still keen. He struggled back to manhood and became a writer of the South. Young Bryan had led to Christ a drunken sinner, the son of the president of an American college.

The young preacher stood at the door of his church one Thursday evening shaking hands with those who passed out. A stranger, a large man with a quick step, rapidly approached the door. "Will you come back again, my friend?" He did not answer, and the preacher pulled him to him, "Are you a Christian?" The man went to his rooming house that night and could not sleep. He was an engineer. Next morning he got on his fast train and drove it to Atlanta. At the station he took a cab and reaching home told his wife about the incident. "Those personal words from the young preacher have influenced me to go with you to church, confess Christ publicly, and unite with the church." The man remained steadfast, attended church regularly, had family prayers, systematically gave one-tenth to the Lord, and led many trainmen to Jesus Christ.

IV

A FRIEND from the University of North Carolina college days, President Robert P. Pell, of Converse College, has supplied the material for the following account of the early ministry of Bryan in Birmingham.

Dr. Pell had lost sight of his fellow student for a number of years, later to hear that he was a student of theology at Princeton Seminary. Then there came to him stories of the ministry of "Jimmie" Bryan in Birmingham. When duty called Dr. Pell to the vicinity of Birmingham, he decided to spend a Sunday there with the single purpose of hearing "Jimmie" Bryan preach. He tells his experience thus:

"I started out to find his church. After walking a considerable distance, I came to a bridge and looked about to take my bearings. From a man standing nearby I asked the location of the Third Presbyterian Church. At first he seemed puzzled, but then suddenly his face lighted up and he said, 'Do you mean Mr. Bryan's church?' 'Yes,' I said, and he pointed down a street to a distant figure and said, 'There is Mr. Bryan now.' I kept my eyes on 'Jimmie' while I walked a distance of some four blocks and there he was, bareheaded, stopping people as they came along and urging them to go to church. When I came in sight, he grasped my hand, and with the warmest welcome insisted that I preach for him that day. Laughingly I refused, telling him that I had come all the way to Birmingham to hear him preach and to discover the secret of his ministry. Whereupon he dragged me into his study, prayed the Lord to put it into my heart to do as he requested, and then repeated his invitation. I was so completely overcome by his confident expectation that his prayer would be answered that I instantly responded, 'Jimmie, I will do anything on earth that you ask me.'

"He then left me, telling me to wait until he had filled the church. He returned to the street and compelled the people to come in. When the building was full, he came back for me, led me into the pulpit, and told me to go ahead. It was a lame effort, for my academic mind had suddenly to adjust itself to his audience of hard-working men and women. Had it not been for Jimmie's unbroken supplications at my back, all my words would have fallen flat. At the conclusion of the sermon he announced that they would observe the Lord's Supper, and he conducted it in such an original, simple, whole-hearted way that I forgot about the formal side of it and wondered at the brotherly scene enacted before me.

"After I had dined with him, he accompanied me to the hotel through a section of the city composed of workingmen's cottages.

BRYAN GROWS UP WITH BIRMINGHAM

Throughout almost the entire district the people were sitting on the porches, and at every gate Jimmie would pause, greet the people, and ask them to attend the evening service. They all knew him and almost every household was to be represented that evening at his church.

"The next morning Jimmie took me in his buggy all over Birmingham, stopping at schools, stores, offices, banks, and factories. He introduced me to his friends — such friends! Wherever he appeared all distinctions — social, religious, and political — disappeared, and love, trust, devotion marked all faces. I cannot help applying to him the explanation that the Scripture gives of the Lord Himself, 'We love him, because he first loved us.'"

V

IN these early years in Birmingham, the most important of human influences entered the life of the young minister in the person of Miss Leanora Clayton Howze, shortly to be Mrs. Bryan. She was a descendant of an old aristocratic family of Marion, Alabama, and lived just across the street from the boyhood home of Major Thompson, young Bryan's ardent supporter and admirer in Birmingham. On his visits to Marion, Major Thompson told his young neighbor of the young preacher at his little church in the new city. Since Major Thompson boasted that he was somewhat of a matchmaker, he insisted on having the privilege of introducing Miss Howze to this minister on her next visit to her brother's home in Birmingham.

In November, 1889, the Synod of Alabama was meeting in the First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, where Judge A. C. Howze was an elder. His sister, Miss Leanora, was at that time visiting in his home. Major Thompson had his opportunity, and when young Bryan appeared for the ecclesiastical duties of the Synod, Major Thompson introduced him to the charming Miss Howze, of Marion. The introduction led quickly to friendship, and friendship to courtship. Mrs. Bryan testifies today that he was an ardent suitor. One day while on another visit to her brother, Mrs. Bryan accepted his proposal of marriage. A story is told about that proposal which Mrs. Bryan says is not at all true, but many of his friends still say that it sounds very much

like him. The story is that at first she flatly turned him down, and then he suggested that they pray. After the prayer, he proposed again, and this time, so the legend goes, she accepted him. At any rate in July, 1890, he persuaded Miss Howze to become Mrs. Bryan. From that engagement day he was a faithful lover. He wrote constantly long love letters. They were everyday necessities until the wedding, January 14, 1891.

It was a church wedding in the Methodist church with the pastor, Dr. Sellers, and Bryan's Princeton friend, Rev. Neal M. Anderson, assisting. Relatives and friends had gathered from far and near. It was a happy day and a happier couple. They began a long walk together, lasting so far, forty-three years, of happy, useful helpfulness.

After a short honeymoon in Florida, they returned to Birmingham to establish their little home. There were few household effects with which to start — just a plain suite of furniture bought on the installment plan. Mrs. Bryan remembers today the first pair of shoes her husband bought for her. He did not have quite enough money to pay, and so had them sent C.O.D. When the shoes arrived there was still not quite enough to finish the payment, but a good neighbor happened to drop in just at that moment and most gladly furnished the necessary amount. The young preacher and his wife were poor, but Mrs. Bryan entered sympathetically into the spirit of complete dependence on God, and, while many times since then the pantry has been bare, they have never suffered want.

His bride entered wholeheartedly with him into the work. Before the babies came, Mrs. Bryan often called with him in the homes of the poor, always encouraged him in the preparation of his sermons, managed somehow to arrange her affairs to suit his most irregular hours, which became more irregular as the years passed, and gradually learned not to worry about her husband of whom no one could keep track. She made the ideal wife for such a man. No wonder years later he could say, "All things come through prayer and absolute faith, but whatever I may be is due largely to the faithfulness of my wife. She has prayed for me and

borne with me in my weakness, impatience, and lack of wisdom for years. The diadem will be hers, whatever diadem there may be."

VI

THE young preacher tried to do everything those first years in his little church. The congregation was poor. He was janitor, Sunday school superintendent, soloist, and preacher all combined. Quite apparently the young minister was working entirely too hard. The elders met and held a secret session over their preacher. They must keep him from killing himself by overwork. First they would oust him as Sunday school superintendent by suggesting the importance of training lay talent. He saw the point immediately. "Yes, they would develop lay talent."

The next Sunday morning he did not show up for Sunday school. "Where was Mr. Bryan?", but no one seemed to know. At 11:00 o'clock he was still not there. Eleven-fifteen and still no preacher. They were just about to give him up and leave the church. Had they best call the police to look for their preacher? Then he rushed in all breathless. "I am very late, my friends. I beg your pardon. We just started a Mission Sunday School and it took longer than we expected." Then he preached.

The young preacher did become seriously ill about three years after he began his work in Birmingham. He was improving, when his physician called in a consulting doctor. They examined him carefully and told him that he was in a serious condition. He must go away for at least six months' rest, and a careful diet with a certain amount of daily leisure was essential. He listened to his physicians for a while and said, "Friends, if what you say is true, I must get busy, for my time is short, but I know God has much work for me to do in this place. It must be done and I cannot delay." Despite the warning of his physician, he got up that day to make a call of mercy, and from that day for thirty-five years he never spent as much as a week in bed from illness. Work seemed to bring him health.

Invitations came from other churches to the young minister to become their pastor. One Sunday afternoon a telegram came

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inviting him to consider a church in another city. He thought it over and quite characteristically came to this decision: "By Monday morning, I had concluded that, if men would send a telegram like this on Sunday, I had better not pay any attention to it." Another message came later from a church asking that he consider their call. While considering this he says, "I went to bed and had a vision of the hungry, starving, sick, blind, and helpless — that vision settled my life in Birmingham." Brother Bryan was in Birmingham to stay.

VII

THE early years of Bryan's ministry were marked by an evangelistic urge which carried him for brief periods to other sections of the South. Most influential upon his own life were visits made to Dr. Guerrant's Soul Winners Mission among the Southern mountains.

Dr. E. O. Guerrant is one of the great characters of American Home Missions. He had a vision of carrying salvation back into the neglected coves of the Appalachian Mountains to those who are perhaps of the purest Anglo-Saxon race in all the world, but who have been neglected in the passing of civilization. Bryan in these early years felt the imprint of the evangelistic fervor of Dr. Guerrant.

Young Bryan had gone to be with him for a week in the Cumberland Mountains. They were riding up a stream to a place called "The Mouth of the Grapevine." A man on the opposite side hailed them, "Is that you, Dr. Guerrant?" "Yes," replied the doctor. "Are you going to have a big meeting?" asked the man from across the river. "Yes, come and bring your friends!" called back the missionary. Up at the Mouth of the Grapevine they began their service the next morning. Dr. Guerrant would talk for an hour, and then young Bryan would take his place. As the young preacher talked away, the older mountain missionary, sitting close behind, would whisper, "Make it plain, Jimmie! Make it plain!"

God used them in the mountains, for men sought God. The old and young, men and women, entire families gave up their guns and whisky, accepted Christ and united with the church. The meeting continued and one morning Bryan was sitting on the little chapel steps reading from the book of Daniel for his morning devotions. Everything was still, the young preacher was engrossed in his meditations, when suddenly a young mountaineer stood before him. "How far down the river do you live?" asked the preacher. "Five miles," replied the youth, "and though it is harvest time, I asked the 'Squire' to let me off to come to the Big Meeting. I have come to the Big Meeting today and I will not go away until I am saved." When the invitation was given that night the young man from five miles down the river was the first to accept Christ as his Saviour.

At another time Bryan had gone to be with Dr. Guerrant in the feuding section of the Kentucky mountains. It was impossible to hold services at night lest the guns of the feudists start popping, but Bryan preached in the schoolhouse in the mornings and afternoons. He held Christ uplifted before those rugged mountaineers. Sunday came and there was to be a meeting for men in the afternoon. Just as the service began, word was passed to the pulpit that two men were there with pistols in their pockets to kill each other. Young Bryan that afternoon preached God's love in Christ with all his heart. When the invitation was given, down the aisle came old "Breck," not to shoot, but to give his heart to Christ. The slim preacher looked the giant mountaineer in the eye and said, "Breck, if you are a saved man, you will take that pistol out of your pocket and put it on the table." Out came the gun and the mountaineer laid it on the table. Down the little aisle passed the preacher, and laid his hand on the other feudist, "If you claim to be a saved man, you will do the same thing." The mountaineer arose, went up the aisle, placed his gun beside the other, and turned to shake hands with his enemy. The congregation rose and cried, "It is all over." No wonder those mountain experiences with Dr. Guerrant deepened the young preacher's faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ.

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There were other experiences such as a week in Baltimore with Mr. Caldwell, of the Hope Institute, when with Bible in hand these loyal workers for the Lord went from house to house leading more than ninety into the church in one week.

Bryan has written of one experience in Baltimore which shows the passion for souls which was ever in his heart. "In Baltimore I went to a Sunday morning breakfast for needy people. Men cried out to be saved and I embraced them as we knelt to pray. In putting my arms around them, vermin got on my coat. I went back to the place where I was being entertained, took my coat off and hung it out the window to get the vermin off. But men were saved and I would have gotten anything on my coat to help save those men! A mortal soul, worth more than all the material universe, worth more than sun and stars, worth more than all the gold in the banks!"

VIII

THE small Third Presbyterian Church was growing. They had finally been able to build a plain cottage by the side of the church for the preacher and his little family. A happy group occupied the tiny manse.

The children of the community were now organized into bands of workers for Jesus. A group of girls, called "The Gleaners," decided to gather pennies and nickels for a pony for their preacher. Finally with some larger sums donated by their elders, they got enough to buy a little pony and a cart. At his suggestion they named the pony "Cheerful Endeavor." Cheerful Endeavor became quite a neighborhood character. He seemed to know where all the Presbyterians lived and wanted always to stop at their homes.

Some were talking that before long they must have a larger church. And then.....

One night a fire started in the streetcar barn next door. Before the fire company arrived, it was beyond control. Flames shot out toward the little wooden church and manse. In a few minutes both were in ashes.

CHAPTER THREE
THE BUILDING OF HIS CHURCH

I

THERE was nothing but ashes. The pony and cart, books and sermons, clothes and furnishings were all gone. The fire had made a clean sweep of everything. Neighbors had taken in the little family and were lovingly providing for their needs.

Early in the morning after the fire, the preacher was standing on the spot where yesterday stood his little church and home. The ground was littered with the charred fragments of household and church furniture. Dr. A. B. Curry, the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of the city, came as Bryan stood there in the ashes, to express his sympathy and to offer aid. Young Bryan turned to his friend, his smiling face illumined with faith, and exclaimed, "It is all right: the Lord is good." Neither minister nor people were ready to slacken their work; the fire instead became to them an opportunity. It was God's call to go forward, to build a larger church and plan for increasing usefulness.

It was no easy task to build a larger church. The congregation were poor, and their community consisted largely of the families of hard-working men and women. There was only one way to build that church — by prayer and hard work. They decided one thing immediately. The church must be paid for as it was built. There would be no debts.

The first question to be decided was where the new church should be located. A new site at the corner of Twenty-second Street and Avenue G seemed more desirable, since corner lots were always more convenient and the building would appear to greater advantage. But how could they ever pay the price for that new lot? It would cost at least six thousand dollars.

The pastor, the elders, and a few men knelt to ask God for guidance. Then someone suggested that the Street Railway

Company in rebuilding their plant might wish to enlarge and might find need for the property next door, where had stood the little frame church and manse. They could at least send a delegation to the officials and see if a sale could be made. They were sure their property was not worth six thousand dollars, but perhaps enough might come from the sale to make possible the more desirable lot. The Street Railway officials knew the pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church. During his years in Birmingham Bryan had preached regularly to the men in their shops, and his influence had been helpful to many. The fire had started in their plant and these businessmen had looked with regret upon the plight of this little church. The delegation from the church laid their plans before the Street Railway officials, told them how the lot at Twenty-second Street and Avenue G would suit better for the location of a church, and then asked them if they would be interested in buying the old property. To their surprise the Street Railway Company immediately offered them six thousand dollars. It was just enough to secure the other lot. The church would be located at Twenty-second Street and Avenue G.

II

WITH a will, they set themselves, pastor and people, to the task of building their new church. Never were more earnest prayers put into building a church; but there was more than prayer, for there was work.

Among the handful of members in the little congregation to which the Princeton student had come twelve years before, was an elderly German woman, Mrs. G. T. Baldauf, who spoke English brokenly. Through the years she had been unusually interested in the finances of the church. Often during those twelve years she had stopped the treasurer to ask if there was enough money to pay the pastor's salary, and, if there was not, she always had her little bit additional to give. Now times were hard and money scarce, and they had their church to build. She must devise some plan to get funds for the church building. Then she worked out her plan. She would gather old clothes from all of

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her acquaintances, and from others also, and take them into the poorer sections of the city and sell them to those who could not afford more expensive clothing. Through the months she kept diligently at her task, and finally, when the church was completed, she had gathered \$3,500 for the building of her church. Indeed she had done what she could.

Some of the work the men could do themselves. Today some women of Birmingham can tell you of how, while the men and boys were digging out the basement for the new church, the girls made lemonade and brought pies and cakes to cheer them on with refreshments. They were exciting days, days of real loyalty and enthusiasm. They had set themselves a great task.

Slowly the church began to rise. First the foundations, then the brick walls; and every new layer of brick brought rejoicing to both preacher and people.

III

MONEY to build came from most unexpected places. Already Bryan had been twelve years in the city, and his unique ministry had caught the imagination of many.

"Big Dick" Wilson was a giant, six feet four inches tall, and tipping the scales at nearly four hundred pounds; but he was an inveterate gambler, a veritable "high roller." His hangout was near the Peerless Saloon, a notorious place, frequented by fast gamblers and high livers. The giant gambler, in his flashy clothes and diamond studs, was standing before the saloon one day when several women passed asking help to build the church at Twenty-second Street. The big gambler stopped them. "Are you trying to build that little church for Brother Bryan out on Twenty-second Street?" he asked. "And are you authorized agents?" When they replied in the affirmative, he pulled out a checkbook, wrote his check for \$500; and then saying, "I wouldn't give Brother Bryan a bad check," he stepped into the nearby bank, had the check indorsed, and handed it to the women. Poor "Big Dick" — he gave \$500 to the church, and died a gambler's death.

When money ran out the pastor and his people met for prayer. One week the treasury was empty. Bills for \$480 would be due

on Saturday. The week was almost gone and there was no visible way of paying yet in sight. They met as usual to pray. Would God not send them \$480 to keep out of debt?

Next day a prominent mine owner called Mr. Bryan to his office. "Yesterday," he said, "I was down at the railroad station going out to my mines and the thought came to me that perhaps you might be needing some money to pay your workmen on the new church Saturday. How much do you need?" "Four hundred and eighty dollars," answered the preacher. He wrote a check immediately for exactly \$480.00.

Step by step the church had risen. Prayer after prayer had most earnestly been made. As yet all bills were paid; there were no debts. The roof was now on, the windows were covered with tarpaulin, and curtains hung over the doors of the lecture room. It was chilly that evening, but five had met with the pastor to pray. The walls were still unplastered and the next step in completing the church would be to get some plaster over those rough walls. As usual, they knelt to pray. As they prayed, the curtain moved, and a nearby druggist entered and asked what they were doing. "He was the last man in Birmingham," said one who was present, "I expected to see there that night." The little group, rising from their knees, told him that they had met to pray for money to help finish the church, and especially they had prayed for money to take care of the plastering of the building. Then the druggist told them how he had been sitting quietly with his wife at home before the fire. For some reason he had risen and told her that he thought he would walk down and see what they were doing at the new church. There he had found them on their knees. "If you will not go in debt," he continued, "I would like to give \$500 for the completing of this church." Immediately he took out a checkbook and wrote his check for \$500 and handed it to one of the men.

IV

As THE building rose, a distinct call came to pastor and people that their ministry must be widened. They had not ceased their

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services when the church was burned. For a few weeks the congregation worshiped in a neighboring church, whose officers had kindly offered the use of their building at such hours as their own services were not in progress. But soon Bryan and his people put up a tent on a nearby vacant lot, and the work of the church went on as ever.

The heart of one of the most wicked men in the community had somehow been touched by the calamity which had befallen the little group of Christians. Formerly he had been indifferent, vile, profane, but now he seemed interested. One night he came to the services in the tent, and at the close of the services the preacher asked all who wanted to be saved to remain. When all had gone, there under the tent was this great sinner, with his head bowed in his hands. "Mr. Bryan, will Jesus save my soul?" he asked. "My dear friend, He has saved me and He will surely save you," replied the minister. Then they got down on their knees together, and, after the preacher had first prayed, the penitent also prayed something like this: "God forgive my sins. Take my heart and wash it in the blood of Christ and help me to live from this day on for Jesus and His Church." The testimony of the minister who knelt with him there in the tent that night is that he rose from his knees a saved man and proved his religion by his life until he went home to heaven.

It was during this period that some of the young women caught the enthusiasm of working for God. Three of them went down to the Birmingham Realty Company, rented a lot for one dollar a year, arranged to get some lumber at half price, and somehow got a little mission shack put up in a rapidly developing section of the city. Here they conducted a Sunday school and Bryan came once a week to preach.

The preacher himself began to widen his already large work to take in more shops and factories, schools and hospitals, fire stations and laundries. He was becoming more and more a minister to greater Birmingham. As their new church rose, their hearts were gladdened, and congregation and pastor girded themselves for larger service.

V

FINALLY they were able to worship in the partially completed church. Boards still covered the windows, the plastering of the walls was not yet finished, and plain plank seats were the only pews available. The congregation, however, on Sunday morning had gathered to worship in their new building. Just before the service began, an elder hurried up to his pastor and said, "Mr. Bryan, I see Mr. William H....., President of H..... Bank of New York City, sitting with his friend, Mr. F....., in the audience this morning. Let us pray to God that Mr. H..... will give us a window for our church." Down upon their knees in prayer went this pastor and his elder before the service began, and fervently and expectantly they prayed that Mr. H..... would provide one of the sorely needed windows. Then the preacher went into the pulpit and conducted the morning service. His sermon was upon Christ's parable of the pounds, and not a word was said about windows for the church.

That afternoon Mr. Bryan was called to the newly installed telephone. Telephones were a novelty in those days, and just beginning to come into general use. Mr. F..... was at the telephone. If it were convenient, he wished Mr. Bryan to come to his office the next morning.

At the office the next day, Mr. F..... explained to Mr. Bryan that his friend from New York had come with him to the new church yesterday and had noticed the need of windows. Mr. H..... wished to give the large window facing the alley, and he also had decided to give some memorial windows on the other side. They had prayed yesterday for a window and the answer today had been several windows.

One of the stained-glass windows depicting Christ as the Good Shepherd was donated by the pastor and his wife in memory of their first child, whom God had taken. It is today by no means a large or impressive church, but three rather unusual stained-glass windows depicting Jesus, as a boy, as the

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Good Shepherd, and at prayer in Gethsemane, tell of the artistic desire of the pastor.

VI

At last in the early spring the church was almost finished. The new windows were in, the paneled doors—a gift of the First Presbyterian Church—were in place, the final touches of paint were being given to the woodwork. But at the side entrance there were still no steps. One afternoon the preacher's horse and buggy was tied in front of his home about a block away. The minister came out and was untying his horse to go to a distant part of the city to preach, when a man crossed the street and said, "I see you have no steps to enter the new church from this side." Bryan explained that they had been praying for steps but had no money as yet to build them. Then the unknown gentleman pulled out his card, handed it to Mr. Bryan, and said, "Tell the church officers to have stone steps put on the church and send me the bill." These are the steps which lead up to the study on the floor above, where for more than thirty years the perplexed and troubled and brokenhearted have passed up to talk and pray with Brother Bryan of Birmingham. If those who have passed up these steps for thirty years could all form in one long procession, there would be no more interesting sight in all the world than to watch them file in one by one to receive help and grace in time of trouble.

Before that church had been finished, money had come from near and far. New York and Philadelphia, Atlanta and Baltimore, Mississippi and even far-off Japan had had a part in building this church to serve Birmingham.

For its day it was a beautiful church. At that time the circular auditorium was very popular. The new church was octagonal, with the pews arranged in a semicircle, and a Sunday school room whose folding doors could be thrown open to the main body of the church. It will seat some four hundred. No one would claim that it is a great or wonderful church building. It

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does have a quiet dignity and beauty, and for those who labored and prayed that it might be, it has ever been very beautiful.

It was years later, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the pastor, that the organ was installed. Mr. Andrew Carnegie was in those days helping churches to secure pipe organs. A friend succeeded in getting Mr. Carnegie to offer this church half of the fund to purchase an organ, provided the congregation raised the remainder. The congregation after all these years still was poor, but raised the required sum and now have a splendid organ.

VII

It was not to be all clear sailing for Mr. Bryan, even when his church was built. A few in his congregation felt that the church building was not as large and pretentious as it should have been. They thought it would have been better to have incurred some indebtedness and had a statelier building. Then some could not understand why he loved the poor so much. If the preacher would only stop bringing in so many ragged down-and-outs, more rich people would come to worship with them. A few even suggested that he had best give up his pastorate and become a city missionary.

But Bryan had come to the Third Presbyterian Church to stay. Gradually those who wished for social prestige in their church life drifted off to the wealthier congregations with their finer buildings, which through the years have come in the better residential sections of the city. The Third Presbyterian, Brother Bryan's church, was doomed to see many established residents move away, until finally Negroes and immigrants, factories and shops, had surrounded his church and crowded out most of his old members. Still they carry on where many another pastor and congregation would have moved to a "more desirable" location; but Bryan and his people stayed, for was there not need and suffering and sin about them everywhere?



Courtesy Birmingham News

GIVE YE THEM TO EAT

CHAPTER FOUR
"INASMUCH AS"

I

"INASMUCH as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me," said Jesus.

"Ever since I have been a pastor," writes Brother Bryan, "my work has been partially among needy people. If there are no poor in your congregation, my humble advice is to get another charge or shut up your doors. Social service alone will not solve the problems of the poor and hungry, nor can it alone fill the need of the breadless and bedless and jacketless. It takes Christ to put bread into an empty tray. I have known women to walk twenty miles for bread, and men to walk ten or fifteen miles for food for their families and clothes to keep them warm. Christ taught us to pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' If He gives you your daily bread, you should divide with someone else. A woman came in the other day and said, 'Brother Bryan, one of your friends sent me a sack of flour, some meat and lard, and a half-ton of coal.' I saw Christ in that basket of food. People do not read their Bibles, they read you and me."

For more than forty years he has believed that the Gospel was best given to the hungry along with bread, that salvation was more likely to be effective for the naked along with clothing, that Christ was best preached to the homeless when one provided a place for them to lay their heads. He has by all odds relieved more suffering than any man who ever lived in Birmingham. He tells us Jesus left us a legacy, "Ye have the poor with you always."

While he believes in associated charities, welfare organizations, and systematized relief, he has never been able either to organize his own relief work or to leave to other agencies that

which he has been doing for so long. He has for years conducted a vast relief work, with a few helpers, but with neither book-keeping, reports, nor organization. He is the organization and nobody does it just his way. One severe winter not long ago soup kitchens were necessary in the city. Thousands of poor had to be fed. Several agencies set up their quarters with record books, equipment, and oversight. The health department of the city insisted that all meals given by charitable agencies should be guarded by safe sanitation. Brother Bryan cared nothing for regulations. People were hungry: he would feed them. As you passed his church, you could see him at noon out under the tree dipping out soup with a ladle to a line of hungry folk gathered with their vessels, or with a big milk can in his hands pouring out milk for the children. He was too busy for any rules of sanitary officials.

If you asked him Saturday night, "Brother Bryan, how much did you and your church give to the needy this week?" he would begin, "We sent some bread and fruit to the poor old sick woman around the corner; the workers fed so many in the basement on Monday, so many on Tuesday, and so on through the week; down at the colored mission, I don't know how many we fed. I gave a woman some money to pay her rent. We bought a coffin for a child in our Sunday school who died, and whose father had been out of work for a year, and . . ." "But Brother Bryan, what did it all amount to? How much would your charity this week cost? How many families did you really help?" Most likely his reply would be, "Son, I don't know. I am too busy to keep records. We leave that to the angels."

A quotation of his expresses well his motives. "Sometimes tears come into your eyes when you watch men and women eating bread and drinking soup and milk. They are all dying for a little bit of love, for a kind word, for a warm handshake. Beneath that torn coat or ragged shawl, the life may be torn, but there is a soul for whom Jesus died, and if we can but point that soul to Christ by our unselfish life, by our loving life, then we will do our part in leading the world to Christ."

II

WHERE shall we find bread that all these may eat? Since the collapse of business in 1929 this question has ever been a burden on his heart. For a supply of bread there were dependent on him many human derelicts, so apparently misfits that only under the ministry of his warm heart did they feel at all comfortable as they received charity's pittance; for the gift at Brother Bryan's is always given with the giver. Some had wasted lives in sin and been reclaimed to life and Christ somewhere under his preaching, but, with the years wasted, they no longer could adjust themselves to the economic system. Some could never be accused of wasting, for they had never had anything to waste; they were simply misfits in a competitive system and had been borne down by the stronger. Others had known better days; every walk of life has passed into the basement of his church for food, but finally when jobs were not enough to go around, many an old man or woman found there was no more employment to be obtained. Through the years they have in ever increasing numbers turned to the little church and its pastor on the corner of Twenty-second Street and Avenue G.

Since 1930 he has almost continuously conducted two stations for the dispensing of food. At noon in the basement of the church he has given food to all who come, and at his Negro mission down the street he has fed the hungry folks. The numbers have varied from twenty at each place to sometimes as many as a hundred or more. There is no red tape, no signing of books, but just the food that has come in that day is distributed to the hungry. He pays very small sums to those workers, a man and a woman at the church, and a Negro schoolteacher at the mission down the street. They, with such volunteers as can be obtained, feed the hungry, and, when there is need, visit the cases which have been brought to their attention. There is but one rule, before food is received one must come to a prayer service at the missions. Brother Bryan believes that all provisions come from God, and, therefore, those who receive food must join in thanks-

giving to God. A half hour before noon the prayer service starts at both missions. Perhaps such prayer before charity is dispensed weeds out a large number of the "dead beats." They reason there is too much praying and too little return, but, with all such looking elsewhere for alms, Brother Bryan has his hands full.

It is no easy task, without an organization, to provide food each day for from forty to two hundred, and, on the side, to clothe the naked and send coal to warm the shivering. How does he do it? Ask him that question and he will answer, "We do not carry it on, but God does."

Brother Bryan prays and uses all the ingenuity of a resourceful brain, his friends of all classes and conditions stand by to help, and God provides. Never did a man have more varied ways of gathering food. The physicians at the large Hillman Hospital have long been his staunch friends, and at their orders all left-over food is not thrown away but sent each day to Brother Bryan's church. A sandwich shop specializes in chicken sandwiches, and in the preparation of the chickens vast quantities of chicken broth would go to waste, but each day this broth is placed in large milk cans and left at Brother Bryan's. Dozens of bakeries over the city save the stale bread for his work of ministering to the hungry. Most of the fruit dealers and grocery men are his friends, and when they find they have too much of anything or that some goods are still suitable food but no longer salable, usually some of it goes to Brother Bryan. Sometimes after a great banquet in some rich home on the mountain the food, which could not be eaten for quantity, is brought down to help him feed the hungry. Farmers far out in the country know him. Perhaps a man fifty miles out in the farming section drives by to leave one hundred and fifty bunches of turnips or two great bags of peas. In the summer, vegetables are continually left at the church by his farmer friends.

One day he had been praying earnestly for food, and when he arrived at the church there were eight new Bibles and a dozen large cans of pork and beans. Such things are not unusual but an everyday occurrence at the church on Avenue G.

“INASMUCH AS”

Of course he needs money. He prays and testifies that the Lord does not fail him. There is never a subscription list. People seem to know that Brother Bryan always needs money and so they bring it to him. One day he will pray earnestly for ten dollars, and when his son goes to open the door there will be a \$10.00 bill stuck under the door. Perhaps the next day he will meet the donor on the street, as has frequently happened, and tell him innocently how yesterday he prayed for ten dollars and found under his door a bill for just that amount, which God had sent. Of course he has no idea who the giver was, but, when the man learns that he has been God's instrument in answering a prayer, you may be sure he is likely to try it again. For three months on the first of each month an envelope containing twenty-five new one dollar bills mysteriously appeared on Brother Bryan's desk, or was slipped under his door, or left in his mailbox. The envelope was addressed "Rev. J. A. Bryan, Birmingham," and inside there was usually a note, "For God's poor and hungry." In gratitude he could think of no way of thanking the giver but by placing a note in the paper, so he went to the newspaper office and told the story. The next day under a large caption there appeared, "Mystery donations for needy sent to Brother J. A. Bryan." The story of these daily happenings makes excellent "copy" for the newspapers of Birmingham, and also proves fine advertising for his work. The people of the city continually talk of Brother Bryan and his ministries, and through the year from rich and poor, Catholic and Jew and Protestant, large amounts are given for his work — how much only the recording angel will ever know.

The most unique way of providing for the charities is from his wedding fees. These all go to the support of his varied work. When he is hard up and can't see any way to pay his workers and feed his poor, he prays God to send him a wedding, and, if need be, three or four. One of his sons, now grown to manhood, confesses that when this prayer comes from his father's lips, as they gather around the table at family worship, it sends shivers up his spine, for almost certainly in a few minutes either a couple

seeking to be married appear or some messenger is at the door with a gift for the work. Brother Bryan calls it "God doing His own work."

III

SOMETIMES there is a touch of the humorous about Brother Bryan's giving. One day a wealthy friend brought to the study door a good suit of clothes. On a recent trip to Europe he had bought a fine piece of goods and had a suit tailored in England. The suit looked as if it would wear forever, and, growing tired of it, the owner decided to give it to Brother Bryan to clothe some ragged brother. "Now, Brother Bryan," he said, "this is an extra good suit. I want you to give it to some worthy man and tell me who is wearing it, for it ought to last him a long time."

The months passed and Brother Bryan again met his friend. "What did you do with that fine English woolen suit I gave you?" asked the man. Brother Bryan looked a bit sheepish. "Well, you see," he said, "just after you left my study that day three men came in. They were almost naked and wanted clothes. I didn't have a thing but your suit, so I gave one of them the trousers, another the vest, and the other the coat. I just couldn't send them away without anything."

Another day the needy were standing around him asking for clothes. He didn't have any garments with which to clothe them and was deeply distressed. As he walked away he remarked, "I just can't give them the clothes on my back, because I have so many funerals."

On one occasion a friend thought the good doctor needed a pair of gloves to keep his hands warm as he traveled over the city. As a little surprise he decided to slip a few five dollar gold pieces into the glove fingers. With grateful words Brother Bryan received the gloves, folded them, and pushed them down into his pocket. A few weeks later, when the donor had heard nothing of his five dollar gold pieces, he stopped his friend on the street and asked, "Well, how did the gloves fit?" "Why, after you gave them to me I met a man who looked so cold that I gave them

to him,” said Brother Bryan. “He needed them more than I.” With a twinkle in his eye, the friend replied, “Yes, and I had put a five dollar gold piece in each finger.”

Sometimes there comes the insistent beggar. He demands everything and is dissatisfied with that which is offered. They are a rather troublesome type, familiar to all who minister to the needy. Brother Bryan has no time to waste on such. “Look here, brother,” he is likely to say, “this isn’t a store, this is a Jesus business.” People come to his office for all kinds of things, for long since the report of his work has passed out into many sections, and some of them think he will prove an easy mark. They come for loans, but he never makes a loan. Some want him to buy automobile licenses, tires, gasoline, and what not; but usually he is able by long experience to weed out most of the unworthy.

More than one person in Birmingham can tell you about the times when he has been given an overcoat and before he got home he met some shivering poorly clad man on the street and pulled off his new coat and slipped it on the other man, for “he needed it worse than I.” The family have through the years had to be careful that their clothing did not fall into his hands. Mrs. Bryan would miss a coat, a boy his trousers, another a pair of shoes, and when inquiry was made, Brother Bryan was usually the culprit, for someone had needed clothing more than his own family.

IV

HE must really love the poor. Two incidents which happen regularly in his services reveal the heart. A poor man might be embarrassed when the collection plate is passed. Before the service begins you see Brother Bryan pass quietly through the audience, stopping especially by those who appear most needy. He bends to whisper in their ear and touches their hands with his. He is slipping a nickel into the poor man’s hand, telling him to drop it into the collection plate, and with the nickel there is usually a quarter or a dime for his own use. He goes to his church serv-

ices with pockets full of coins and usually leaves with the same pockets empty. Theoretically it is a poor way to administer charity, but in reality it grips one's heart.

For years at his midweek service on Thursday he has brought the prayer meeting to a close with an unusual invitation: "At the close of the service all who care to remain are invited to have a light lunch with the pastor." When the service is ended great platters of sandwiches are passed to those who remain. "That sandwich is all some of them have had today," he explains as you depart with him, "and it makes it easier to invite them to have a light lunch with me, for they do not want charity."

Often he is able to relieve the embarrassment of a needy man by a touch of humor. With a chuckle he recalls something which takes the attention away for a moment from the charity which he is giving. A poor man stands asking for a pair of shoes and Brother Bryan happens to have a pair which will fit. He hands him the shoes, saying, "It just happened that I could get these shoes for you. I am so poor myself. Did you know that I used to go to church barefoot myself? God gave you these shoes, just as He gave me the ones I am wearing, and we had certainly better be careful where we walk in them. He is taking notes on the places where our feet take these shoes. As for me, I am going to God's house, for that is the place He commands me and you to wear our shoes."

To sympathize with the poor, one must pass along the same road with them. Brother Bryan has genuine sympathy, for because of the generosity of his heart there have been many days when he has not known where the food for the next meal for his family would come from. He has left this to God.

V

"I was in prison, and ye came unto me."

A SACRED HOUR it was, at least forever so to the one who had come with him into the city jail that day. He climbed the stairs to the upper room where the white women and girls were kept. The

attendant thrust a great key into the lock and Brother Bryan, with a smile and a cheerful word, entered the prison cell. Eight white prisoners were there. On a cot in the bare but clean and whitewashed room lay a poor young thing sobbing with her handkerchief over her face. Three girls sat on other cots, and four older women, Brother Bryan, and his companion completed the group.

The fatherly old man began to tell them the story of the visit of Jesus to the house of Simon the Pharisee. With apt phrases borrowed from the life of today, he described the Pharisee — his pride, his boasted goodness, his fine house and excellent meals. Then in a voice vibrant with sympathy he told of how “a woman of the alley” had come to the house of Simon that day, “because I have heard that Jesus is here.” He described how Simon coldly sent her from his door. Then while Simon went back into the butler’s pantry to arrange some detail of the dinner, the “alley woman” slipped in and with tears streaming from her eyes bathed the feet of Jesus with tears and dried them with her hair, while covering His feet with kisses. Then with the love and gentleness of the Master Himself, the old man of God told these eight women that the act of that woman of long ago was repentance. He told them that Jesus, who freed the sinner in Simon’s house from her sins, was the same loving Jesus who would also be willing to save them. Gently did he plead with them to take Jesus for a Saviour, and then, lifting his face full of love and confidence in the Christ who saves, he prayed in tender words for his “sisters” here today with him. With a handshake for each, conveying more sympathy than words, the stooped servant of men was gone to visit others in prison. As the door closed, and the key set again the big bolt, the one who had come with him was certain that Christ had been there.

VI

THE United States during the years of Dr. Bryan’s ministry has been the “melting pot” of the world. Every great industrial city has been crowded with a multitude from other lands, who came

to this land of promise, and found perhaps instead of "milk and honey" labor and hardship and small friendliness. No need of this land has been greater than for men with the compelling love of Christ in their hearts, who, because of all that Christ had done for them, would find themselves debtors "both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise," and who would then proceed to break down every partition which separates men and make them one in Jesus Christ. Bryan, of Birmingham, has been one of God's chosen men to bring down under the powerful force of love the prejudices which divide the races in this new world. Like his Master, he has been able to clear the barriers in his ministry to man.

He has counted twenty-seven languages among the people to whom he has ministered. "In this immediate vicinity," he says, "where my work carries me into every corner, I find Hungarians, Slavs, Germans, Bohemians, Chinese, Japanese, French, Armenians, Sicilians, Italians, Greeks, Irish, Scots, Africans, English, East Indians, etc. — a varied assortment, to be sure."

In the city of Birmingham he numbers all races among his friends. A prominent Italian merchant can tell you of how when he and his little family arrived in the city years ago they lived in a cottage near his church. Brother Bryan visited the home before they could speak English, played with the children, spoke the universal language of friendly helpfulness, and bound in love to him the immigrant family, who have now risen to riches. Today says his Italian friend, "He is the greatest spiritual influence in Birmingham."

Some twenty years ago when immigration was in its full tide many Italians came to find employment in the new steel mills around Birmingham. Brother Bryan found an Italian group some ten miles from his church at Ensley who seemed peculiarly in need of religion and education. He enlisted the sympathies of a Miss Witherspoon of his congregation and began a school to teach the children and some of their elders the English language, elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic, and on Sunday afternoons they came to learn of God. One little Italian boy heard for the first time about heaven. He had never heard

of such a wonderful place before, and, knowing from experience that most good things cost, the little fellow wanted to know what heaven would cost. Brother Bryan took the question of the boy and then explained to that Italian group what heaven had cost Jesus in order that it might be free to men. For fifteen years he and a group of helpers conducted this mission for Italians until gradually they were assimilated into the life of the new world.

To see a royal welcome, one should go with Brother Bryan to dine in one of the numerous Greek restaurants of Birmingham. One day he invited a professor, who taught Greek Literature in a nearby city, to eat with him in a Greek cafe. As he entered, what a reception! Two farmers from the country rose from their seats to grasp his hand, saying, "Brother Bryan, we read your letters in the paper." The two proprietors rushed up, pulled back chairs, urged him to sit down. "Now Brother Bryan," says one, "I have a nice little spring chicken I will broil and have all ready for you in a minute." "My friend," he replied, "we haven't time to wait for that today; just give me a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and give my friend here anything he wants." Just then half a dozen working girls rushed in for their noonday meal, and when they saw him they came over to shake hands. He grasped their hands, and then, with a girl's hand in each of his own, the fatherly old man said, "Now let us pray. God bless my friends, my friend from Georgia here, these sweet girls. God bless us all and help us to love Jesus: For Jesus' sake. Amen." Customers passed by and one slipped him a quarter to help feed the poor. The lunch was brought and the proprietor sat down to chat for a few minutes with his friend. The two men from the country rose from the table, came over, and asked, "Brother Bryan, will you come out to preach for us? We have just finished a new church, which cost \$2,000.00, and, if you will come out, we will pack it to the doors." He promised to come on condition they announce it around through the neighborhood and get him up a crowd.

The meal was over and, as they rose to leave, the professor slipped over to the desk to pay the bill. Throwing up his hands in protest the man behind the desk shook his head, exclaiming,

"Money is no good when one comes with Brother Bryan. Now Brother Bryan," he continued, "you come back here next week with your friend and let us fix you up a chicken dinner, and bring your son, who is going to Japan as a missionary, and his wife. We must have you all before he goes." While one brother arranged the dinner party for next week, the other came from behind the counter with paper bags stuffed full of cantaloupes, grapes, and peaches to put into the car. As they were leaving, the professor friend leaned over the counter to thank the men for their hospitality. The Greek grasped his hand and said, "The world would be a different place if there were six more Brother Bryans in it."

One day an undertaker in the city called to ask that he conduct the funeral of a Hungarian woman. When Brother Bryan arrived at the house he realized how deeply the sorrowing husband had loved his wife. They sang "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and the foreign-speaking husband seemed to understand. Brother Bryan prayed with him and told him that Jesus was his friend. With the tears rolling down his face, the man grasped the minister's hand and said, "Mr. Bryan, I understand; sure, Jesus is the boss." From that day Brother Bryan never passed the Hungarian's fruit stand but that he urged something on him — an apple, peach, pear, or a banana. It showed that he still remembered.

In his earlier ministry there were many Germans who could not understand English. Bryan spoke no German, but in his unusual way he gathered them together, read brokenly from their German Bible, and repeated the Lord's Prayer with them in the speech of their fatherland.

So through the years, by the ministry of love, he has broken down the barriers of race. Love, Christ-empowered love, had imagination and willingness to find a way, and Bryan ministered to the races.

VII

THE Negro forms approximately one-third of the total population of Birmingham. In such a city the black man has made remark-

able progress, but still many of the race live in deplorable conditions of poverty, ignorance, and superstition. The welfare of his Negro brethren is a continued concern to this Southern minister.

Like most Christian Southerners, he has a real affection for the black man. He owes them a debt of gratitude for all they have done for him and his in the past. A few years ago he wrote an article for a religious paper on our obligation to the Negro. In it he told this story:

“I remember a colored man named Harry, who was my father’s body servant in the Confederate Army, and after Appomattox when my father lay on the ground suffering from a dreadful camp disease, he said, ‘Harry, you had better stay up near Richmond or Washington, where you can get a job, for I can’t do anything for you, like I have.’ He looked at my father and said, ‘Marster John, do you think I would leave you here? I am going to get you on the train going South and take you off at the depot and then take you to Miss Mary.’ When the first train came along the soldiers were on the cowcatcher of the engine, in the box cars, in the freight cars of all kinds, and hanging on the steps. This Negro took my father, and, by the aid of someone, put him on top of a freight car, and my father lay with his head in this Negro’s lap as the train swept through Richmond, Weldon, Wilmington, Florence, and then stopped at a little country depot, where this faithful servant took him off the freight car and carried him on his back three miles into the country to lay him at my mother’s feet. Do you think I could ever forget a man like this?”

From this Southern background has come to Birmingham one who binds white and black together by the love of Christ. Brother Bryan knows the black man and believes in him. He said recently, “I wish to show my gratitude to the Negro race and to God, who put them at our door, by trying to do more for them as I near the end of the pilgrimage of life. Unless one has been reared with them, has sacrificed to give them food and clothing and to provide milk for their little children, one does not understand them.”

The Negro is a religious soul, and Brother Bryan understands his peculiar psychology. He has preached to them for so long in shops, jails, and churches that he gets their interest from the first word. On a weekly visit to the jail he arrived at noon. Fifty Negro men and women were gathered in one of the dining halls with plain but substantial food before them. After Bryan had finished his dinner across the way with the jail officials and policemen, he came over to talk to the Negroes. They sang for him "Honey in the Rock," one of the Negro spirituals. Then he told them the story of how the Cyrenian helped Jesus to carry the cross. He believes that the Cyrenian was a black man, and vividly described how, when Jesus stumbled under the burden, the black man picked it up for Him. He asked them if they loved Jesus like that black man of long ago and if they were willing to carry His cross today. Immediately he had their attention. Interspersing his remarks with bits of humor, he told them about their sins and what had put them in jail. In his denouncing of sin he spared not the white man. "The difference between the white man and the Negro," he said, "is that the white man plays golf on Sunday and the Negro caddies for him; the white man furnishes the Negro whisky and the Negro sells it for him; the white man stays out of jail and the Negro goes to jail for him. Why do you let them make fools of you?" Then he prayed God to bless and keep them and to help them to find Jesus and the better way of living while they were in jail. With a parting humorous remark, which brought a burst of laughter, he was out of the door and gone.

Some years ago, as he saw the vast need of the black population, he decided on a mission of his own for the Negro people. He found an educated Negro schoolteacher, who was out of a job, hired him for a small salary, rented a cottage in the Negro section near his church, and his mission began. Here he has a day school, Sunday school, prayer meetings, and preaching services. Each day food and clothing are given to the needy who apply. There is no organization behind his mission, just Brother Bryan, his friends, his Negro helpers, and faith. During late

years, when so many of the colored race have suffered from unemployment, from fifteen to a hundred Negroes have received assistance here each day. Touching incidents occur frequently in this work for the black people.

A Negro baby had died, and in distress the mother came to Brother Bryan. The undertaker had told her that it would cost sixty dollars to take the little body back to the country cemetery. She had no money. What would she do with her dead child? She went to Brother Bryan. He prayed with her and promised to do what he could, and she went her way trusting in God and His servant. Down came the telephone. He called a man in charge of one of the city cemeteries and a little plot of ground was given at his request. Next, he went to the Negro helper in the mission, he explained the situation, and they conferred together. Finally they had a plan. Two dollars would buy a plank, nails, a little paint, and some cloth to line a little box. The Negro schoolteacher turned carpenter, made a little casket, painted it white, and lined it with a bit of white satin. Next day both Brother Bryan and his Negro helper left their work for a few hours, and, in Brother Bryan's car, the little black child was carried in the little handmade casket to be laid gently in the begged grave.

One day Mrs. Bryan was taking her husband to task for rising so early on Sunday morning to go to his church office. "There is no sense in the world in his getting up at five o'clock on Sunday to get to his study. He might just as well stay at home and rest until after breakfast," she urged. "But you don't understand, Dearie," he replied. "Sunday morning is the time I pray with all my colored friends. They get up early to go to their work of preparing breakfast in the homes of others. I meet them on the street as I go to church and we stop and have a prayer together. You see I must be out early."

Suppose Birmingham with its vast Negro population should have a race riot, is there any man who could step between the races and bring peace? Ask that question of any thoughtful

man in the city and undoubtedly his reply would be, "Yes, there is one, Brother Bryan."

VIII

Two immoral women were lying at death's door in the Hillman Hospital. One of the poor souls in despair had taken poison. She had determined to end it all. Life was for her a living death without a hope.

Someone told Brother Bryan the story of these women. He entered the ward. Beside the cot where lay the writhing form of the poisoned harlot, he stopped, stooped over, kissed her forehead, and quietly prayed to the Father God. "Sister, go thy way and sin no more," he said and was gone.

Years later this woman, now completely changed, wrote anonymously to the newspaper her story, saying that on that day the first ray of hope came into her darkened soul. "He was the friend of publicans and sinners," they said accusingly of Jesus long ago. Brother Bryan has tried, certainly imperfectly, to follow in His steps.

He has been a friend to all. "Next to God's work and His blessing," he has written, "I believe that Birmingham has taught me that friendship is one of the greatest things in life. It is the sweetest, holiest, and most far-reaching agency on earth. Friendship is based upon unselfishness and a desire to help someone — a trust in others more than in self. I accept the love of my friends not as a gift, but as a sacred trust imposed upon me. My friends keep me healthy, sound, and able with their love. They are my eyes with which I see, my ears with which I hear, my mouth with which I speak, my heart with which I love — they are my inspiration."

On June 7, 1914, the *Birmingham Age Herald* ended an editorial on his work thus: "We who have watched his footsteps see the tracks which he has left among the desolate and distressed."

CHAPTER FIVE
HIS DAILY ROUND

I

And he said that it was an ordinary day's labor!

IT was 5:30 A.M. The city was not astir. Here and there laboring men were on their way to work. A young minister drove up before Brother Bryan's manse and, with a wave of his hand and a face radiant from communion with his Lord, the old man came down the steps and climbed into the car. It was to be an ordinary day, no specials, just his daily round, with one exception — there was to be a new chauffeur. His boy was to have a day off and the younger preacher was to take his place for a day, just as a plain chauffeur, to do nothing and to say nothing, but simply to drive the car. When this request had been made the week before, Brother Bryan had willingly acquiesced, but had queried, "Can you be ready at five-thirty in the morning?"

Five-thirty o'clock! — after two brief prayers spoken to God as they sat in the automobile, they were off. The first stop was to be the headquarters of a transfer company on the far outer edge of Birmingham. While the car sped along in the early morning hour, Brother Bryan explained that years before, the transfer company had been located near his little church and that it was his custom to conduct a prayer meeting for the men once a week. The owner of the company had long since died, but said he, "I promised Mr. H..... that whenever I could I would hold services for his men. They moved so far away that I don't get there so often now, but whenever I can I go out and talk to the men."

Six o'clock and the car drew up before the transfer company's buildings. The men were beginning to come in to punch the clock. It was still about half an hour before work began, when the drays and trucks would scatter over the city. An old Negro

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"mammy," who for years had cooked for some of the colored men, was one of the first to greet her friend. "You ain't been out here in a long time, Brother Bryan, we almost wondered if you're dead."

"Now, Auntie, get your boys together. I am going to preach to them this morning," answered the early morning preacher. The old colored woman started back among the trucks and through the building rounding up the men with the dire threat, "If you don't go hear Brother Bryan preach, I ain't going give you nothing to eat today." Under such menacing persuasion, before long the congregation began to gather. Finally there were some ten white men and thirty Negroes in the office, sitting on the floor, benches, desks, and counters, with late comers sticking their black heads in the doors. They sang a hymn together and the minister talked to them in a language all could understand, and from a text where he could speak with deep experience, "Ask, and it shall be given you." (Matt. 7:7.) Then he prayed for that group of black and white men, who with their drays and trucks would be carrying many of the loads of the great city that day. With a cheery good-bye as the men hurried off to their trucks, the first service of the daily round was ended.

II

It was now time for breakfast, but it had to be short this morning, for there was the engagement at the broadcasting station for fifteen minutes at 7:45, and of course there might be time to drop in for a few minutes at No. 4 Fire Station on the way to the radio rooms. Back in the city the "chauffeur" was directed to a Greek restaurant. "I just want some coffee and a piece of toast and give my brother here anything he wants," said the minister to his Greek friends. Before the toast and coffee had been finished, a prayer had gone up from the table for the proprietor and his helpers. Since the regular chauffeur was not on the job that day, the driver felt that he must surely pay for his breakfast, but the Greeks would take no money from anyone who came with Brother Bryan.

HIS DAILY ROUND

Yes, there was time to drop by the fire station before the radio hour. When he entered the fire house, they knew the purpose for which he had come. He walked back to some chairs in the middle of the room, shaking hands with the men as they came up, and introducing them to his friend. He took his seat, just as much at home as if he were gathering the folks at home around him for family prayers, and the eight husky fire-fighters saw nothing strange at all in this early call. While they sat intent about him, he told them of the conversion of Paul, interspersing his account of the story of long ago with some sage and keen advice for the daily life of his friends, the firemen. When he had spent a few minutes with them and prayed, he told them he must hurry on, for the radio around the corner would not wait, if he were late.

"This is WKBC Birmingham, Alabama," said the announcer. "Brother Bryan will now lead us in our morning devotions." Lifting his voice, not quite so well adapted now for singing as it had been in years gone by, the minister sang a few lines of that familiar hymn,

*"Take time to be holy,
Speak oft with thy Lord."*

Then briefly he prayed. For a number of mornings now, he had been using for his radio devotions the Second Epistle of Peter. That morning his theme was, "Keep in mind the words of the prophets." He reminded his unseen hearers of some of the precious words of Isaiah, "who looked down through the centuries and saw Jesus." His message centered around the promises of Isaiah, which he felt had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He quoted, "He will gather the lambs with his arms and carry them in his bosom," which found fulfillment in the tenderness of Christ. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots," and in a few sentences he traced the Davidic ancestry of Jesus. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion," and then he said, "The Church cannot go to sleep today. She can't stop and quarrel. The Church must

remember the sentences of the prophets, the fields are white to harvest. The Church must reap a harvest of human souls." Again he quoted, "I will trust and not be afraid," and pointed out how often the expression "Fear not" occurs. God has promised, "I will help thee. I will strengthen thee. Even if for a little while, I withdraw my face from you, yet with everlasting kindness I will draw you unto myself." Quoting in his own way these passages which had meant much to him, he spoke of the comfort the words might bring that day to all in trouble or in pain. There was the great sin of minimizing the power of Almighty God. Softly he sang,

*"Be not dismayed, whate'er betide,
God will take care of you."*

The devotional quarter of an hour ended with a prayer of blessing for the thousands of hearts which bled today. How many had listened? Only God knows.

III

THE morning is passing and it is time now to think about the fifty or more hungry unemployed, some of them mere human derelicts, who will be gathering at half after eleven o'clock in the prayer room of the Church to listen to a simple service and afterwards receive a wholesome meal, perhaps the only food of the long day. The burden of the poor always tugs heavily at his heart. Of course, unless the unusual happens, somebody, of whom he knows nothing, will send food of some kind around to the church during the morning. Then there will be the broth from the restaurant which specializes in chicken delicacies, and the "left-overs" from the city hospital. But, yes, God provides for His poor through those who exert themselves. There are some errands to run.

A friend at the city market called yesterday to say that he had a larger supply of fruit and vegetables than usual and Brother Bryan was welcome to them, if he would drive by and fill up his car. The car stopped at the market and the man, who was think-

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ing of the poor, climbed out, passed into the market, shook hands with his friends, and came out followed by two men loaded down with produce, which was packed away on the back seat. At least there would be a bit of fruit today.

Then there was the Greek baker down by the railroad station, who always saved up his stale bread on Wednesday for Brother Bryan. He would drive by and get what loaves were there. He entered the bakery at 8:15 o'clock. "Where is my friend today?" he asked of the girl behind the counter. "He has to be out just at present," replied the saleswoman, "but he fixed up your bread before he left." "I must telephone my wife now," said the minister. He lifted down the receiver and told Mrs. Bryan where he had been that morning, where he was now, and of the good friends who were supplying him with food for the hungry at the church. As he finished giving a full account of himself, he inquired if anyone had wanted him yet for a wedding or a funeral, and, receiving a negative reply, he placed the receiver on its hook. The bread came without money and without price, save that he offered a prayer to God as the girl stood across the counter with bowed head.

There were now fifteen minutes unaccounted for on his schedule, just time enough to drive to No. 1 Fire Station and have a talk with his boys. With fifteen men around him, he took for a Scripture verse, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." In simple language he talked to those men gathered in front of the fire house about why men do not come to Christ. Reverently they listened and silently they bowed in prayer, as the best friend of the firemen prayed to God in their behalf.

IV

A GREAT hour of the day has arrived. It is now nine-thirty and Brother Bryan has half an hour over WBRC, the Birmingham Broadcasting Company, which is a commercial radio company with the widest range of any of the stations in the city. He has

been looking forward to this hour as one of the big events of the morning. Nothing thrills him quite as much as to face the microphone and talk to an unseen audience about his Saviour.

As he went into the inner room to speak, the "chauffeur" of the day remained in the outer room to ask some questions. How was it that this preacher, who always talked in such a simple way, was on the radio systems of Birmingham sometimes as often as a dozen times a week and almost always at least once a day? Who listened to him? Why was he in such demand? How could a commercial company, which operated strictly for profit, give half an hour to a religious talk?

There was no complete answer to these questions. The question of personality always remains a bit intangible, but, in talking with those who met him so often in the radio rooms and who checked carefully on the response of the masses to the programs, a few facts were gathered. When Brother Bryan was on the system, somehow there were more listeners than for any other clergyman in the Birmingham district. For some reason the multitudes waited for him. Perhaps it was because so many of the working men heard him in the shops and factories at his little services, and when they came home they told around the evening meal a story of his eccentricity. Mother would speak up, "Jennie, run get the evening paper. We'll see if he is on the radio tomorrow and we will tune in and hear what he has to say." One of the radio announcers always says, "The best friend of Birmingham, Brother Bryan, will now speak." Birmingham listens to Birmingham's best friend. When he speaks there is a very human appeal in his talk. He may stop right in the middle of a sentence to interject, "I am so thankful for all my good friends."

"What does he talk about?" "Why, anything and everything," replied the radio man, "but always Jesus Christ. Again and again he will say, 'I know nothing but Jesus Christ.' He always begins with a verse of a hymn and usually closes with another verse, unless the minutes have slipped too quickly and he sees there is no time left. He never gets over on another's time. He closes on the minute. One never knows exactly what his subject

will be. After his song, he may start out, 'I am going to talk about criticism today.' Then he will tell how he heard some woman score her neighbor, but sooner or later every subject comes around to Jesus Christ."

"Can you tell me anything else about our friend and the radio?" asked the "chauffeur." "Well," replied he, "WBRC never gives free time to anyone except the American Legion and Brother Bryan. He is the only man I ever heard of for whom this station has cut into a chain program of the Columbia Broadcasting System to let him on the air. We've done it for Brother Bryan, but no one else."

Then the time was up. The radio preacher stepped from the room. It was time to hurry away to other duties. We were off again.

V

SOME woman's organization had invited him to give a talk about his visit to Nazareth. It was away out in one of the suburbs. No, he did not remember to what church the woman belonged. Her name was Mrs. G..... and she lived at 415 K..... Street. She said that she was the chairman of a circle or something, and that on Wednesday morning she would gather in her members and the neighbors and they all wanted to hear him tell about his trip to Nazareth. The car sped over the five miles to the edge of the city and turned down a street lined with the modest cottages of working men. It drew up at number 415 and ten women were waiting inside. They greeted him as an old friend and apparently each one knew him. He could not call a single name, but, with tact born of long experience, he called them all "My dear friend," and they never once suspected that he did not know their names. The chairman announced that Brother Bryan was with them today and that he had come to talk to them about Nazareth, the boyhood home of Jesus. He started off by saying, "I am so glad, dear friends, that you have invited me to come and talk to you about Nazareth." Then, to bring his message in the proper setting, he began to tell about other features of his

trip, and the first sentence was the last about Nazareth. The audience seemed to enjoy it just as much as if he had stuck to his subject and, as he left, profusely thanked him.

At 10:45 o'clock he was back at the church. First he must report to Mrs. Bryan and find out if there had not yet been a call for either a funeral or a wedding. This finished, there was time for a little pastoral work. Sitting at his desk, by telephone he inquired after some of his sick, called a friend or so to thank them for food sent in to feed the hungry that day, spoke a word of encouragement to a man whom he felt might be discouraged, and each time before the conversation was ended there had been a prayer reverently uttered before the mouthpiece.

This finished, he went downstairs to see how preparations for the midday meal were progressing. Today there was enough; no one would go away hungry. Mr. Zeigler, his helper, had them all arranged, some forty of them, for the prayer service, which always comes before the food is served. Brother Bryan stayed just long enough to see the service started and then he was off to a supposed appointment in the streetcar shops.

While in his characteristic way he was rounding up the men for the noonday prayer service, a prominent judge of the city courts appeared upon the scene. The preacher was delighted that his friend, the judge, thought enough of the service to come away down to the car barn at the noonday hour. While Brother Bryan was busy getting his men together, the judge whispered to the "chauffeur," "He doesn't know it, but he has forgotten that he asked me to take this service for him at the car barns. It is all right, though. It will help him to see that I am here." With a prayer by the judge and a song in which everybody joined, the service began. His subject was Nicodemus. "Nicodemus," he explained, "had to move to Jerusalem because his wife had some girls she wanted to get into society." The story of Nicodemus was a starting point, and before long he was talking about the problems of working men: making a living, going straight, telling the truth, praying, and his favorite subject, "going to prayer meeting." The whistle interrupted the talk, and, grabbing up a

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bundle of old newspapers in which one of his sermons had been printed, he thrust them into the hands of the nearby men with instructions to distribute them through the shops. Back to their work hurried the men and the service at the car barn was over.

Mrs. Bryan had told him to be sure to come home for lunch and not stop at some restaurant, for the "chauffeur" was to eat with them that day; so they drove out to his home at the foot of the highlands and found Mrs. Bryan ready with luncheon.

VI

BIRMINGHAM was all aflame over a tragedy of a few days previous. Three young women, riding in their automobile a few miles out upon a lonely mountain road, just a hundred yards or more from one of the highways, which came into the city, had been set upon by a lone bandit. He had held them captive for three hours, after robbing and insulting them; and, when finally they had resisted, had shot one girl dead, mortally wounded another, and the third was for the time a nervous wreck. Brother Bryan had been deeply moved by the tragedy. Almost every prayer since then had some reference to the sufferers and their families. The girl dying at the hospital had once been his next-door neighbor and this intensified his emotion. The first thing that afternoon he must call at the hospital and pray with the mortally wounded young friend. Perhaps she would be too sick to recognize him, but at least he could pray at her bedside, and, if the nurse felt best not to admit him at the moment, he could linger before her door and offer up a prayer. He was in the hospital for just a few minutes and came out with troubled face. The world was so full of heartache.

His next call was in an Italian home, where there was a long-sick mother. "She can only speak a few words of English. We can't talk much, but she seems to understand my prayers," he explained.

But on our way out we passed a butcher shop. "Stop here just for a minute," he said. "This man has given me a piece of meat each week for five years, and I haven't been here this week."

While he climbed out of the car to get his "piece of meat," which happened to be a fine big steak, the driver picked up the evening paper and glanced down the page. What was this? "Brother Bryan is Nominated as One of Alabama's Ten Most Distinguished Citizens." As he read on, he found that the paper had started a contest to name the ten most useful and distinguished citizens of the state. Already several politicians and educators had been named, and now somebody had placed Brother Bryan in nomination.

At three o'clock he went upstairs into a hot apartment to pray with the sick Italian woman, who did not understand English but knew the universal language of prayer. For many months now he had been dropping in to see this mother of Italy, and downtown two stalwart merchant sons felt there was no one quite like Brother Bryan.

The afternoon was hot — Birmingham in August. The boys at the nearby fire station would be glad to get a glass of ice water for him. No. 7 was one of the small stations, out in the sparsely settled residential sections. There were just four men on duty, but two hurried off to get glasses of ice water. Off came his coat and he laid it on the fire truck. His hat was on the floor and he was sprawled out in an arm chair waiting for the water. When sparkling glasses of ice water were ready, the men drew up their chairs about him, and they chatted for a while about things in general. The water finished, he must give them a Bible lesson before he left. The congregation was just four; but what did that matter, had not his Lord delivered one of His greatest sermons to Nicodemus all alone in the night hours? He took the little letter of Jude for a subject. He began by telling something of Jude's message, but when he had finished, Jude himself would have been surprised at all his letter of a page had brought to four burly firemen upon the subject of strong drink. Of course, he finished with a prayer: the men would have been amazed had he ended otherwise.

VII

THAT afternoon the city jail must be visited. The city chaplain could not neglect the prisoners. Admission was easy, no card of

admission, for when the well-known figure with his stooped shoulders stood before the door, every turnkey knew to let him pass wherever he pleased. Unless he was pressed for time, or there was something unusual that called him from the jail, he would make the rounds before he finished.

When he entered that afternoon, it was as one on familiar ground. With a guard bringing the keys along, he started up the long flight of steps to the third floor. That afternoon he would work from the top to the bottom. At the top of the building the guard put one of the big keys into the iron door, pushed the door open, and the minister stepped into the room for white women prisoners. There were only three white women in jail, two sprawled out on cots and one sitting in a straight chair. With perfect ease he greeted each with a handclasp and, seating himself in their midst, he asked in a fatherly voice, "Sister, tell me why you are here?" His well-known character, the gentle manner, his fatherly appearance, all elicited confidence, and each woman briefly told him what had placed her in jail. One was there for drunkenness, another for fighting, and the third for "selling liquor."

"Sisters," he began, "Jesus loves you." Then in the most direct manner, he talked of what sin, and some sins in particular, would do for a woman. Tenderly he prayed to the Great Father for these three daughters in their difficulties. As he rose to leave, one glanced to see what impression had been made. One woman, youthful but with hard lines about her mouth, clothed in cheap silk, with gaudily painted face, kept on chewing the wad of gum in her mouth and looked stolidly at the door — had there been any impression at all? Upon another's cheek there glistened a tear!

Another cell contained eight difficult Negro prisoners. They were in close confinement, behind strong bars, and in the door was a small iron latticed opening through which the eight men peered at those who came along the hall. Before the grated opening, Brother Bryan stopped. Every Negro knew who was there and pressed forward to see him. In his direct way he poked a finger through the bars at a big burly black man and said,

"What are you in here for?" "Stealing," replied the Negro. "And you?" as the finger shot at another. "Selling liquor," came the reply. "And you? — and you? — and you?" Back came the direct answers, drunkenness, forgery, stealing, fighting, etc. Then with his kindly face before the bars, he said to those black fellows, "You men pray what I tell you. Pray out loud now after me." He bowed his head, and began, "O Lord, we have stolen, forgive us. O Lord, we have drunk liquor, forgive us. O Lord, we have forged checks, forgive us." Down the list of crimes he went, with a prayer for forgiveness; and on the other side of the bars deep voices from black throats echoed back the pointed prayer of the clergyman. There could be no doubt of what these men were asking God to forgive. He raised his head and said, "Jesus loves you men, and when you get out of here come around to my Negro mission and I will help you get started in life again."

Twenty black women were handling the prison laundry in another room. He stepped in the middle of the group and put again that same question, "Now what are you women doing here?" Brazenly, some apparently without a sense of shame answered back, "Fornication, drunkenness, stealing, fighting, etc." Others simply bowed their heads in shame. He did not press the matter, but, beginning with that oft-repeated saying, "Jesus loves you," he asked, "Now what are you going to do about it?" The message was direct, simple, in language suitable to their poor intellects. Not one minute did he talk above their heads, and the brief prayer at the end was directly for the spiritual needs of these women in jail.

There were other stops along the corridors. Sometimes a prayer for two or three gathered at a cell opening or a word to someone passing through the halls. He entered one part to hold a brief service for some forty white men, and, as they crowded round him, he turned to the "chauffeur" and laughingly said, "Sometimes I think I have more friends in jail than anywhere else."

His ability to adapt himself to his audience was never better seen than at the final service that afternoon. Towards five o'clock

the prisoners, who had been out on the farm, streets, roads, and elsewhere to labor during the day, began coming in for the night. Many of the Negro men occupied cells which opened out into a large hall. Until time to lock the prisoners in at night there was a large measure of freedom granted to this easily controlled group. Stepping through the doorway, whose great steel door now hung open to admit the returning men, he made his way to the center of the hall and climbed up on a box. He called the Negroes around him. They came from all directions. Many of the big fellows were stripped to the waist, and their big muscles stood out like whipcords under their black skins wet with perspiration. The elderly clergyman from his box had those hundred men under his control. "Sing me a song, men," he ordered, and a deep bass voice started up a Negro spiritual. How that jail did echo with those hundred voices! When they had furnished a song, it was now his time. He preached to them. His style was almost that of a typical Negro preacher, in its simplicity. Quaint humor, often at the expense of crime such as had brought them to jail, brought roars of laughter, which was followed by a seriousness which would wipe every smile from the face. Under all the superficialities with which he held them, there was a story of sin, of goodness, and a Saviour. He knew how to get a message across to the black men in jail.

What was it one missed? Was there something different from the usual visit of a minister to jail? Yes — something, but what? Yes, one had it. No one had begged him for money or besought him to get him out of the jail where sin had put him. They knew he would help every single one of them, when they had finished their time, but Brother Bryan was not the kind to help them beat the law or interfere with justice.

VIII

THE Lord's work is not done in a laboring day of eight hours! The climax of the day was yet to come. For several days now Brother Bryan had been telling the young minister about his special preaching service at Tarrant City, a village built around

the pipe manufactories, some ten miles from the heart of the city. Last week a laborer had come to ask, on behalf of the working men, if he would come to their town and preach each night for a week. The local Presbyterian preacher was away for his vacation, so it was impossible to consult him either about the services or the use of the church building. The men wanted it the next week. Without the consent of the local minister, the church building could not be used; then they were not sure that the building would hold the crowds. After a few minutes of consultation, Brother Bryan agreed to go each night, beginning on Monday, provided the men, who wished him to come, would arrange for the use of the city hall and would drum up a congregation. They would start on Monday night, and, if it went off well, the services would last for one week.

Brother Bryan had been telling of the great time he was having each night out at Tarrant City with the workers. "How many do you have at a service?" rather skeptically asked the younger minister. "Oh, from two hundred and fifty to four hundred," casually replied the older man. The young fellow had himself had some experience in estimating congregations, and he knew quite well that most speakers greatly overestimate their audiences. He smiled a bit to himself, for he was sure that Brother Bryan was this time shooting far off the correct mark. However, like a doubting Thomas, he wished to see for himself, and this evening was to be his opportunity. It was hot, sizzling hot. Was it possible for an old minister, a dozen miles from home, to gather in a stuffy city hall a congregation to hear the Gospel?

When the car left the jail, it was some fifteen minutes after five o'clock. The preaching service would be at seven-thirty that night. First they must drive straight to the church, perhaps someone might have called about a funeral, and then who knew what might have turned up? Finding all quiet at the study, Brother Bryan came down the church steps carrying a basket of fruit, which he felt sure they would have time to deliver at the home of a needy friend on their way out of the city.

At a little restaurant along the way, they stopped for supper. It was a tiny eating place, with about a dozen tables, and a big

fat proprietor, who was also the only waiter. He was glad to see his friend, and complained that it had been a long time since he had paid him a visit. Supper was soon ready — steak, potatoes, bread, coffee. When they had finished, again it was the same story, the “chauffeur” couldn’t pay, in fact no man’s money would be taken in that restaurant, if he came with Brother Bryan.

Down the street a dozen blocks or more, the car stopped to let him carry the fruit to his friend. He took the basket to the back door and stepped into the kitchen for a few minutes of prayer, as it was now too late to call at the front door, since the widow would at this hour be preparing supper for the boarders.

Along the street a little farther lived an old mother with her daughter: she did not get out very often now, and he wished very much to take his friend and introduce him to her. Together they went up the walk and found the grandmother sitting on the porch. For a few minutes they brought a word of cheer to the lonely one, and then, when both had prayed, they hastened on.

At ten minutes before seven the car stopped before the city hall at Tarrant City. It was a plain workingman’s village, no evidence of wealth, unpretentious stores and plain homes. Many of the factories were closed, for times were not prosperous, and many men were out of work. The city hall was upstairs over the local fire department. The uniformed men were sitting in front of the building that hot afternoon. Everyone knew Brother Bryan. He sat with them for a few minutes, asking questions about their homes and the meeting to be held a little later, and then before long he was teaching them a Bible lesson and bringing it to an end with prayer.

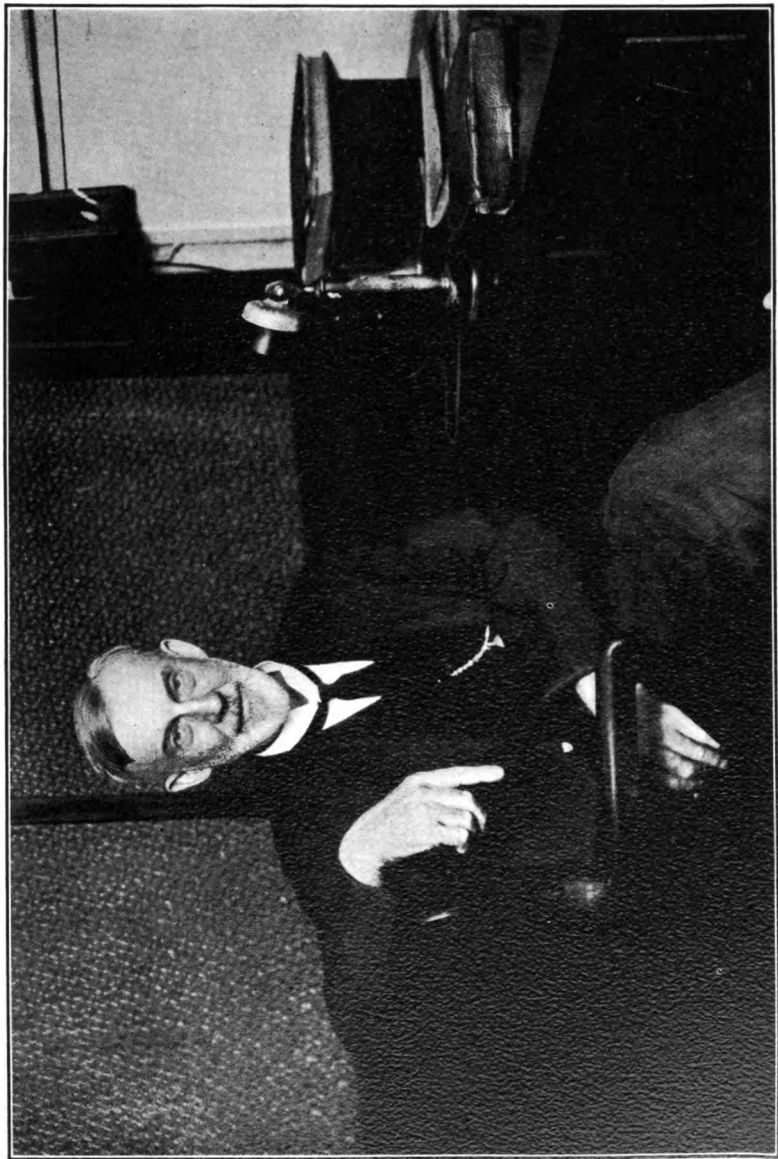
It was still some minutes before the appointed hour, but he would like to be sure that all things were ready upstairs. So he climbed up the long flight of stairs to the hall above. The room was plain, not an ornament in it: at one side was a cheap piano, and a few dog-eared hymnbooks lay scattered around. Some thoughtful person had opened the windows and the night air was now driving out the stifling heat of the room close under the hot roof. Some of the electric lights would not burn, so, when

two boys came in, he sent them off for new bulbs. The "chauffeur" looked around — yes, there was room, but would they come?

In a few minutes people began to straggle in. Yes, certainly he had been overestimating his crowds. There would not be fifty in the audience that hot night. A few minutes before seven-thirty they began to come, boys and girls, men in shirt sleeves, women with babies in their arms, and some cripples hobbled up the stairs. Perhaps there were a hundred present when Brother Bryan started the services promptly at the appointed hour. A man rose to lead the singing. A hymn was given out. Before the singing had gone very far, it was quite evident that the song leader's willingness was greater than his musical training, but how they did sing! The old minister encouraged them to sing, and hymn after hymn they sang lustily.

In fifteen minutes the house was almost filled. The younger minister, after a hasty calculation, knew that at least three hundred and fifty people were present. The night was scorching hot: by now the young minister's collar was limp as a rag and perspiration was running in beads down his face. When his congregation had gathered, Brother Bryan started to the platform. On the way, he pulled his coat off and laid it on a chair, and then he stood before them, in shirt sleeves and baggy trousers, worn from the exertions of speaking to fifteen groups already that day, but still full of enthusiasm, for he had a message of God for these hard-pressed laboring men and women.

His theme was the crucifixion of Christ. In vivid language he described how they crucified his Lord. Then he told of how Jesus was buried. He did not think well of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, for they had been secret disciples, and had they not failed Jesus at the crucial hour? He gave an imaginary conversation between the two, when Nicodemus said to Joseph — "Nick to Joe: 'It would be a shame to put Jesus in the potter's field. If you will give me your new grave, I will get the embalming fluid.'" Nicodemus, he thought, bought the embalming material just as cheaply as possible and the two in a halfhearted way buried Jesus. Upon his lips the Bible story was a living



Courtesy Birmingham News

BIRMINGHAM'S CONFESSIOAL

reality, for the expressions which he used came out of the very lives of the men to whom he was speaking. Everything was so real. It was because Mary could not trust Joseph that she came early to the sepulcher to see if he had really embalmed her Lord.

Then reverently, but picturesquely, he told how Jesus rose from the dead. Now and then a baby cried and a mother would lead a child from the hall, but on went the Bible story of Jesus appearing to the women, of Mary saying "Rabboni," of Jesus walking with the two on the way to Emmaeus. Then he asked, "What does all this mean to you?" His plea was that men should live differently when Christ had died for them. Now he had the building ringing with laughter, and again eyes would fill with tears; sometimes the language was crude, a bit slangy, but through it all was an eloquent plea from a loving heart that men and women should be loyal to Jesus Christ. His thoughts wandered, all kinds of unexpected themes came up in his sermon, there was not the slightest appearance of a homiletic outline; still the interest of the audience did not lag. They believed in him and heard him gladly. With a final plea to be faithful to Jesus, he brought the service to a close with a prayer, which fell like a heavenly benediction upon hungry souls.

As he started down from the platform, while slipping one arm into the discarded coat, he called out, "Come tomorrow night and bring your friends with you." It was about eight-thirty o'clock. Some came to shake his hand and speak a few words, but in a few minutes he was in the automobile and speeding homeward. The journey was made in silence. He was tired now, and the man at the wheel had much of which to think. It had been a long day's labor in the Master's vineyard. Would not the Lord of the vineyard say, "Well done"?

As the car turned into the street leading up to his home, the "chauffeur" said, "Brother Bryan, this has been a rather unusual day, has it not? You put on a little extra steam, no doubt." And he replied, "No, just about my ordinary day's work, except that today there were no funerals or weddings and I had more time for other things."

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONFSSIONAL AT AVENUE G

I

TWENTY-SECOND STREET leads directly from downtown Birmingham to the magnificent residential sections of Red Mountain. Here on the heights, out of the soot and smoke of the furnaces, live those who have acquired enough riches to choose their places of abode. On the top of Red Mountain live the millionaires of the city, while over the mountain and down into the beautiful valleys beyond has spread this community of Birmingham's elite.

On the way out at Avenue G stands Brother Bryan's little brick church. It is on one of the streets which lead to the Highlands, but it itself has been caught and surrounded by the poverty and squalor of an industrial city. A great ice plant, factories, automobile repair shops, filling stations are on all sides, and sandwiched between are humble dwellings, where racial groups meet and live together. On two sides are sections inhabited almost entirely by Negroes, while across from the church are found Italians, Greeks, Jews, with here and there a family from out in Alabama. At the Twenty-second Street entrance of the Church at Avenue G is located Birmingham's "Confessional."

It is Brother Bryan's study. There is nothing much to indicate that it should be called a "study," no books, no typewriter, no filing cases, none of the customary ministerial paraphernalia which clutter the studies of twentieth-century clergymen. In the room are just two books, a Bible and a telephone directory, both from appearance much used. What need has this minister for more? From the Bible comes his message, and the common people hear him gladly. If there were other books, he would

have no time for them, unless some friend would read them and give him the contents in a predigested form as he hurried along in his car to conduct some funeral; and, if a book did happen to come to his desk, some visitor would drop in ere long and, finding nothing else to give the parting guest, Brother Bryan would force the book into his hands and dismiss him with a prayer. He is interested in all kinds of information, but with the burden of Birmingham on his heart there is little time for reading. That telephone directory is well worn, for the telephone on his desk is the best assistant that the Third Presbyterian Church has ever had. Next to the Bible, the telephone is the most important equipment of the little study. The old minister with his telephone in his hand gathers his congregation for his Sunday services, and with this modern invention he carries on much of his pastoral work for a great city. He can call a score of homes by telephone more quickly than he can make a call two blocks away. It is a very busy telephone, in constant use, and probably carrying more prayers each day than any telephone in all the world. The floor is covered with a cheap rug. The furniture is simple. There are two desks, one flat-topped holding the Bible and telephone, and the other a desk with a special lock top, from which many a gift has been taken for those who have come to this room in need, but long since the lock has been broken and it has never been repaired, for when the day is over there is nothing left to lock up at night, so why bother about making fast an empty desk? Before the telephone is a swivel chair, and the rest of the furnishing consists of two chairs and a seat. Friends have given a picture or so for the walls. Above the desk, upon which are the Bible and the telephone, is a picture of his Lord, with the crown of thorns pressed down upon His brow. To the right is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper." Nearby is a picture of Christ with the Rich Young Ruler, who is turning sorrowfully away. There hangs a picture of the angel at the empty tomb, and inscribed beneath the angel and the grave, "He is not here; He is risen." Someone has presented the minister with a framed verse, which reads:

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THINKING OF YOU

*"What does it matter
How long the lane,
Or whether it twists
And turns again?
I'd travel it blithely
The whole length through,
Were I sure at the end
Of finding you."*

This is Birmingham's "Confessional."

II

WHEN the financial crash of 1929 swept down upon this industrial center, Birmingham felt the full blow of the catastrophe. Day after day the newspapers carried stories of those who could endure no longer and had ended all by suicide. Men were caught in the avalanche of falling markets, the great steel mills had no orders, business was paralyzed. Then came the tragedies of men who overborrowed at the banks. When they were pressed by creditors, who urged that the accounts be settled, sometimes unwisely, if not dishonestly, they used trust funds. Hopelessly enmeshed, many a man saw but one way out. In the great houses on Red Mountain and in the valleys beyond there were many haggard faces during those days of crashing markets.

One day the newspapers carried a little notice, which read something like this: "If you are discouraged, can't see a way out, and are thinking of ending it all, before you do anything come to see me in the study at Twenty-second Street and Avenue G. Signed, J. A. Bryan." Never will it be known all that happened in that bare little room during those days. Several expensive shining cars were seen to glide up and park outside the "Confessional." Had one peeped in the window, one might have seen an old minister on his knees with his arm over the shoulder of a kneeling man. The secrets of the "Confessional" are locked in the heart of the minister at Avenue G. He betrays no confidences.

But within five weeks of the appearance of that little notice in the papers, twenty-five harassed and burdened men had read the notice and accepted the invitation to come and talk it over first. In the "Confessional" twenty-five men had knelt to pray with one who could sympathize and had gone out resolved to battle on a little longer before they called it "quits."

III

IT WAS a casual visit to a restaurant in downtown Birmingham. The waitress was busily placing napkin and silver upon the table, when the guest glancing up from his newspaper asked, "Do you know this Brother Bryan, whose sermon and picture are here at the top of this page?"

"I sure do," replied the waitress. "He is the best person in Birmingham. When they get better than Brother Bryan, they can't live on this earth. I think he must have helped half the people in Birmingham. He helped me once when I was in trouble."

When the waitress had returned with the dinner, the man explained that he was in the city seeking information to write a book about Dr. Bryan, and, if she did not mind, he would like to hear the story of how he had helped her. This is the story of the waitress.

She was a Roman Catholic girl from New Jersey. She came south with a man she loved, but he proved a drunken, worthless husband. One night, soon after the arrival in Birmingham, he came home beastly drunk, burst into the room, and began to beat her. Picking up a chair, he brought it down upon her head, but her uplifted arm caught the force of the blow. She awoke in the city hospital, with an arm in splints, an ache in her heart, and a husband in the city jail.

Poor girl, she was all disconsolate! Where could she turn for help? Should she go to the priest? But she did not know him. The city was still new and strange. She had heard of one man in Birmingham who was always helping somebody. She would go with her troubles to Brother Bryan.

So the Roman Catholic young wife, with her arm in splints and the ache in her heart, went out to the "Confessional" at Avenue G. "Come in, my sister. What can I do for you?" invited the fatherly old man sitting at his telephone. The sympathy in his voice drew her to him. She told him the whole story, ending with the query, "And what shall I do with my husband in jail?" "Why, just leave him there, sister. That is where he belongs. Folks who get drunk ought to stay in jail," was the wise reply. Then he talked gently to her for a while and prayed to the Heavenly Father about this daughter of His in trouble below. From his presence she went back to face life with new courage, "For he can comfort more than anybody else."

When she had finished the story, the guest asked, "Now how would you describe a man like that?"

When she had brought a glass of water, with thoughtful glistening eyes, she replied, "To remember him is to wonder that so much goodness can take mortal shape." Perhaps a trifle sentimental — but then she had in trouble entered the "Confessional" at Avenue G.

IV

OFTEN the visitor at the "Confessional" is some poor soul who has seen life at its worst. Sin has done its work. The face is marked by vice and the suffering which surely follows sooner or later. As sometimes the shipwrecked vessel comes limping into port, torn and battered, these shipwrecked souls pass up the steps to Brother Bryan's study. There is no secretary waiting in an outer office to stop one and ask the purpose of the visit. Brother Bryan is easy to reach, for his door is usually open. If someone is in his office and looking up he sees another standing in his door, he points to a chair out in the Sunday school room and says, "Sit down there a minute, I will soon be through." When he begins to pray you may know that the conference is almost over, for with a few words the visitor is dismissed, and he is ready for another.

This "Confessional" has heard many a strange story. Could its walls speak, they would tell many secrets of life in a modern

THE CONFESSIONAL AT AVENUE G

city, its heartbreak and its shame. All kinds of derelicts have passed its doors, old men and women in rundown shoes and ragged clothes, young girls with painted cheeks, and boys who have made their first mistakes. They have come to talk and pray with the minister of the sympathetic heart.

He never wishes to embarrass the true penitent. In that bare room some woman with a tattered life starts amid her tears to sob out her sordid story. She begins — but before she has gone very far, his hand gently touches her shoulder, "Now, sister, if it embarrasses you to tell me the details, don't do it. Tell it all to Jesus. You are a penitent or you would not be here." When for a while he has talked with her about the better life, he suggests a prayer, perhaps something like this: "O Lord, thou knowest our dear sister here. Thou knowest how far she has drifted from Thee and from the right. Save her, bless her, help her to do right. Help her to make a new start, to give her life to Jesus, to be a good woman; for Jesus' sake, Amen."

V

UNDOUBTEDLY many imposters have through the long years worked upon the heart of the minister in the "Confessional" at Avenue G, but on occasion he can speak the truth bluntly. There are too many who have done their very best and failed, too many in dire need of body and soul, for him to waste sympathy upon the undeserving.

Among many in the city Brother Bryan's prayers are thought to have almost magical effect. Let Brother Bryan pray and it is sure to happen, of this they are certain. One day a young man walked into the "Confessional" at Avenue G. He stated that he had lost his job and had come to ask the minister to pray that God would give him another job.

The old man carefully looked him over, and then said, "Son, didn't I preach to you five or six years ago out in our mission on the West Side?"

"Yes, Brother Bryan," answered the boy. "I thought so," murmured the minister. "Son, can God trust you with a job? Your widowed mother was here yesterday and told me that you had

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been out of work for six weeks. She said that before this you had had a good job. You were working and making \$150 a month. But you wouldn't even pay your own laundry bill at home. When your little brother had pneumonia, you would not help your widowed mother pay the drug bill. My son, God can't trust you with a job. He gave you a job once and He took it away because He couldn't trust you with it. I can't pray for God to give you a job, but I will pray that God will make you so that He can trust you with a job. You will have to be a better man before God can give you work."

So in the "Confessional" they prayed — not for a job, but for a change of heart and life. How much more often this is the one thing needful!

VI

THERE was another youth, a shivering lad of twenty, with telltale pallor in his face and the distinct odor of prisons upon his scanty clothing. His hair had grown long and matted. The khaki shirt was open down the front. As quietly as possible one day he slipped into Brother Bryan's study and standing there all forlorn before the clergyman, he said, "I just got out after eight weeks, Brother Bryan, and mother sent me to see you."

"So the devil got you, did he?" quietly answered the fatherly old man. "You should have been coming here to prayer meeting."

"I did, Brother Bryan — don't you remember me? But they accused me of robbing a woman, and honest to God, I didn't do it," pleaded the boy.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked Dr. Bryan.

"I want to get some clothes to start over again. What you see is every rag I've got," replied the young man.

"All right, son, I'll tell you what I will do. You take this dollar now and come back here tomorrow and I will have some clothes for you," said the man who understood, "and, son, before you go let me pray for you."

Then in the "Confessional" the minister prayed for this lad, just out of jail, and the next day at one o'clock delivered to him clothes with which to "start over again."

CHAPTER SEVEN
"LET US PRAY"

I

"LET us pray." These are the words most frequently upon Brother Bryan's lips. No man has ever believed more implicitly in prayer than he, and never were prayers more unconventional. Prayer seems to him as natural as for a man to breathe the air. Why not, he would reason, for is God not the most real thing in the universe?

Birmingham believes that Brother Bryan's prayers are effective. Now for many years its inhabitants have been coming to him that he might pray with them and for them. Often they call him by telephone to request a prayer. At four-thirty in the early morning an unemployed man calls by telephone, "Brother Bryan, pray that we unemployed may find work today." A man shot by a murderer has them send for Brother Bryan and, as the minister leans over his couch, the dying man whispers, "Brother Bryan, pray for me all night." He goes with an Italian to a hospital to pray with a desperately ill woman. Her eyes brighten as he prays, though the woman does not understand a word of English. The Italian at his side remarks, "She understands your love." One day as he was leaving a fire station, a Syrian barber came out of his nearby shop and said, "Brother Bryan, you prayed in the fire station, why don't you come and pray with us?" He is the only man, of whom most of us have ever heard, who can walk into any poolroom of his native city and quietly say, "Let us pray," and every hat and cap will come off and the whole group reverently, and without a snicker, bow their heads in prayer.

Prayer for him is a reality, and one would never think to question his sincerity. The men who scoff at the very suggestion

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of prayer stand reverently while he prays. Some years ago he was to give a series of six devotional lectures before the ministerial students of a Southern theological seminary. He felt it was a great opportunity and a heavy responsibility to speak a word to the young preachers when they were beginning their year's studies. A student met him at the train and brought him by automobile the seven miles out to the seminary. "He prayed six times between the station and the school," remarked the deeply impressed student.

"The pastor must live on his knees," declares this man of prayer. "He must advance on his knees. He must visit on his knees. He must prepare to preach on his knees. When we pray and our prayers do not go any higher than our heads or the roof of our room, we are not to blame God. The prayers are unanswered because we have not met some condition. The conditions of answered prayers are faith, a life with the sins forgiven, and the unselfishness which would not use the gift of prayer to satisfy an unworthy desire."

II

PRAYER, for him, is always in order. His prayers have taken many a person by surprise. One day a Birmingham daily came out with a story, which ran somewhat as follows:

It was the rush hour on the main street of the city. Office buildings and stores had poured out their thousands for the noonday sprint to lunch and back. Sidewalks were congested and the street corners were jammed with crowds waiting for the lights to change that they might dash from curb to curb. Down the street came a young woman in a great hurry. She reached the curbing just as the light flashed red and the traffic officer's whistle blew its warning.

A dainty foot was stamped impatiently. "Oh, damn!" she said.

A hand touched her gently on the elbow, and above the clang of streetcars and blare of autos, she heard a quiet voice, saying, "Sister, let us pray."

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She turned and, astonished into silent immobility, heard an old man say, “O Lord, give us both patience to bear with these traffic lights. Amen.” While she still stood transfixed in the eddying whirl of pedestrians, the stoop-shouldered figure in ministerial garb had moved off with the crowd.

His first automobile Brother Bryan attempted to drive himself. Soon he had to give this up, for there was so much continually on his mind that he violated in the most unexpected ways all the traffic regulations. One day in front of a large hotel he turned his car around in the middle of the block and ran head-on into the car of a man from another state. The incensed owner of the other car started off by calling him “an old fool,” and continued in a tirade. “Hold on, my brother,” replied the unruffled Bryan. “It was all my fault. Let us pray and thank the Lord that we were not hurt.” The stranger had never met a man like that, and, completely taken by surprise, he bowed while Brother Bryan prayed. When the prayer was ended, without another word he stepped into his car and drove away.

A reporter for one of the daily newspapers tells of how sometimes Brother Bryan appears in the pressroom three minutes or so before an edition is to come out, calls the men to stop for a brief prayer, and, in the midst of a great newspaper office, the Jewish foreman and all will bow for a second and then rush to get the edition out on the minute.

The clerks in one of the leading Jewish clothing stores delight to tell how Brother Bryan has often prayed with them. One day the proprietor called him by telephone to say that, if he would come down and select a suit, they wished to make him a present of it. He came down, with Mrs. Bryan to do the selecting, and asked immediately for the senior partner. The clerk informed him that Mr. B..... was quite ill. “Then we must pray for him,” said Brother Bryan. Immediately he knelt upon the floor, his wife beside him, and surrounded by clerks and customers, he prayed God’s blessing on the sick Jewish friend.

Perhaps the most surprised man of all at Brother Bryan’s prayers was the thief who held him up one Thursday night a

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few years ago. He had been detained at church after the prayer meeting and was walking home alone. Just as he crossed a dark alley, a man slipped out from between the houses, pushed a gun into his face, and muttered, "Hands up." Up went Brother Bryan's hands without a moment's hesitation. The bandit searched his pockets, taking the little money and his watch. Then he was astonished to hear his victim say, "Brother, let us pray." Immediately the prayer began, slowly the gun lowered, and as the prayer ceased the thief pushed the watch and money back into his hands and told him to go on home.

III

"WHAT do you believe in praying for?" asked a friend some months ago.

"I believe in praying about anything on earth. If we are on praying terms with God, we can talk with Him about everything," was his prompt reply.

"Do you have any plans for your prayers?" asked the friend.

"Yes," said he. "On Monday I pray for all families of my acquaintance; on Tuesday for all baptized children and young people; on Wednesday for all church officers, trustees, Sunday school teachers, and all leaders in the church; on Thursday for all the meetings which we hold and for all acquaintances at home and abroad; on Friday for schools, colleges, seminaries, and missionaries; on Saturdays for the Sunday schools and all the church services on the morrow. Yes, and I keep a prayer list of the unsaved. Sometimes I pray for a man for years, sometimes twenty years, and finally he is saved."

His prayers, at least all that others hear, are brief and to the point. He is not given to much speaking in his prayers. If something comes into his life to make him thankful, he praises God. A friend tells of the day he took him for a ride across the mountain. At one place the view was glorious. "Mr. S.....," he said, "let's stop right here a minute and thank God." If he needs something he tells the Lord about it. Perhaps he is late for an engagement and he bows his head to ask God to give him some

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way to get there by the appointed minute. Then he looks up to see a friend drive up to the curb, calling, “Brother Bryan, let me take you wherever you are going.” If he gets in a situation he can’t handle, immediately he prays. There is a fight at a filling station, and the wife of one of the men calls Brother Bryan from his church across the way. He steps quickly across the street and stands between the surprised men and starts to pray. And why not, he would reason, since God is a reality.

Perhaps the most characteristic of all his short prayers — and one is apt to hear it daily — is “O Lord, help us to fight the devil.”

IV

PRAYER links him to God, the telephone will link him to his fellow man, and, when both circuits are complete, he pours out his heart to God for the man, woman, or child who listens at the other end. It has long since become the expected thing for him to pray with almost everyone who speaks to him over the telephone. This modern invention makes it possible for him to pray with many a person with whom it would be impossible to kneel in the same room. Often in some free hour he will write out a list of a dozen or more names, pick up his telephone, and call them one by one, and say, “I have just called you to have a little prayer.” Whether rich or poor, idle or with lives overfull of pressing duties, they all appreciate those prayers. As a wealthy society woman in the Highlands expressed it, “We feel better all day when he calls us by telephone to pray.”

The citizens of Birmingham call him and ask him to pray with them. The requests that come to him for prayer by telephone would make a most unusual list. They call him to pray for the sick, to ask God to strengthen them in times of difficulty and trouble, and to speak to the Heavenly Father for comfort when death comes. His telephone rings and some unemployed man asks him to pray that God will enable him to find a job. A man calls and says that he will commit suicide in a few minutes, but will Brother Bryan pray for him now before he dies? No

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wonder that when his telephone bell rings and he moves to pick up the receiver, one standing nearby may hear him pray, "O God, help me, help me to answer patiently the telephone. Help me not to be hard, but help me to comfort or bless this party."

One day an unknown man called to ask him to pray for God to bless him in a business transaction. Brother Bryan responded, asking the Lord to give the man wisdom, to help him to be honorable, and to bless him in his business, and when he said "Amen" a smile swept over his face and his eye twinkled. "Look here, my friend," he said, "Fred S..... called me the other day to ask me to pray for a blessing on his business, and when God blessed him he gave \$500.00 to his church. You want to be sure to play fair with the Lord."

V

"BROTHER BRYAN is Arrested," was the startling headline in the evening paper a few years ago. Under this caption was written a story.

The day before he had parked his car too near a fireplug. The officer on the beat, not recognizing the car as belonging to the well-known clergyman, tagged it with an order to appear in police court the next morning.

Brother Bryan appeared in traffic court next morning to answer the charge. There was a line of twenty-five people waiting to pay fines when he appeared, speaking to every one with his gentle voice and ever-familiar "God bless you." When the throng realized what he had come for there was an instant outcry.

"I'll pay his fine," a fat man cried, and beside him a woman thrust forward a twenty-dollar bill. "No, let me," she said.

That was on the outside of the railing, and inside a similar stampede was on. For thirty-five years Brother Bryan had ministered to the police department. He had buried their dead. He had visited their fatherless and widowed. He had preached to them, praised them, and loved them. The policemen were on their feet; any one of them would pay his fine, they assured the officer of the day.

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The presiding officer shook his head at them all and let Brother Bryan take his turn in line. When he reached the desk, the officer opened the case formally—and smiled slyly.

"Do I hear any motions?" he asked.

"Yes," said the fat man. "I move that the case be nolle prosequi."

There was an outcry of seconds, and with a perfectly grave face the officer declared the case settled. At that moment the traffic captain stepped up and placed an official signature across the tag.

Brother Bryan seemed bewildered. His eyes filled with tears and his voice trembled as he said, "I just thank you so much." Then he took off his hat and said simply, "Now we will have a little prayer." A hush fell. Hats came off. Brother Bryan began, "O God, I thank Thee for the opportunity granted your poor servant to bring these people together for this moment of prayer. I thank Thee for having guided my car to the fireplug that I might be arrested and have this opportunity to glorify Thy name and bring these people together for thoughts of Thee. Thy guiding hand was back of the officer who tagged my car. I thank Thee for this opportunity to start off the day with prayer. The day will be much happier for them for this moment." Then his voice broke a little, "And I thank Thee especially, Lord, for the loyalty of so many fine people, who have offered to pay an old man's fine. And all of it to the glory of Thy holy Name; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

He put on his hat and with another, "I just thank you so much. God bless you, brother," he went on his way. But the spell of his presence lingered in the police court long after his footsteps had died away.

VI

THE fragrance of his prayer life has permeated the whole city. He has prayed everywhere and under every imaginable condition. Sometimes he stops beside a parked car and, standing there on the sidewalk, he prays with some fashionable woman as she sits within. Again he enters the office of a strong businessman, and before he leaves he always prays. It may be a man of another

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race whose hand he takes in his as he prays standing there on the street.

He has prayed with thousands in the hospitals. At times when they are too sick for him to speak to them, he stands quietly at the foot of the bed and prays.

When people begin to talk about others, he makes it a rule to say, "Let us kneel and pray for them. Let us talk first to God about them."

A leading attorney of Birmingham tells of the time when a church quarrel had rent one of the great congregations of the city. He was distressed and did not know what to do. The attorney was invited to address a mass meeting of citizens at the Chamber of Commerce building with a view to organizing a new church. Finally, he decided he would call Brother Bryan and tell him that he was going to join his church. Brother Bryan told him to come to see him. When he arrived, Bryan said, "Now B....., let us pray about this matter." They knelt and Brother Bryan prayed for the pastor and both sides in the church quarrel. He prayed fervently that God would help the people to show Christian love. When they rose from their knees, he laid his hands on the prominent lawyer's shoulder and said, "B....., you can't join my church. The Lord never needed you more in your own church than now. You go back to your own church and help them to do right."

The influence of an unselfish man of prayer, who can estimate?



MRS. JAMES ALEXANDER BRYAN

CHAPTER EIGHT
THE FATHER

I

"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children."

FORTY-TWO years ago Mr. and Mrs. Bryan started a little home in Birmingham. They had very little to place in the few rooms except love, but love has through all the years glorified their home. Seven children have come into this family, six of whom have grown to useful maturity, and now again the house echoes with the laughter of children and the patter of the feet of the grandchildren on the stairs. It would seem most unnatural for the manse of the Third Presbyterian Church to be empty of children; it has always been so full of the youngsters.

The first child was a little girl. She bore a very unusual name — Kekomoisa, meaning "Dear Little One" — handed down with pride from Mrs. Bryan's father's mother. Little Kekomoisa lived only one brief year and left the young minister and his wife with great vacant places in their hearts. Then the other children came, Mary, John Edwards, James, Thomas, Augustin, and Harry; five boys and one girl. Mrs. Bryan, as the children came, was forced to give up her church activities and center her life in the making of the home. For this busy minister his home has been a place of refuge, his only recreation, his joy and pride. The mother has been the tower of strength within the home. It has fallen as her lot to care for all the details of household management and to keep safely hoarded from her husband's charitable hands enough to feed and clothe the husky youngsters. Without Mrs. Bryan at home, efficient and careful, watching every detail of her husband's and her children's welfare, long ago Brother Bryan would have worn himself completely out. For a long lifetime Brother

Bryan has ministered to a city, while Mrs. Bryan has quietly worked behind the scene.

II

THE Bryan home has always been perfectly natural. Religion, of course, was the center of its life, but religion was never here mixed with sanctimonious sadness. When the family were gathered around the table for the evening meal, the father had stories of the interesting people whom he had met that day and of the unusual predicaments in which they were found. At the humorous tales he could scarcely wait to finish before breaking out into his chuckling laugh. The children used to say, "Father just has more fun than any of us." His keen sense of humor, which has kept the chuckle in his voice through all these years of dealing with human suffering and sin, is never seen to better advantage than when he is in the family circle. It is a jolly group when the Bryan family all get together.

His family have always been taken into Brother Bryan's confidence. When one keeps company with him for a day, one notices that perhaps half a dozen times he will call Mrs. Bryan by telephone and tell her where he has been, whom he has seen, and what has come to the church to feed "his poor." Not only the mother, but the children have known through the years the intimate details of his work. He has always assumed that they would be interested in "God's work," so each day he tells them much of what has been done, and all six of the children are intensely interested in "father's doings."

Upon his sons and daughter came early the impression that their father was a burden carrier for other people. In the evening he would come home completely worn out, sometimes with sad lines over his face, and they knew that the day had brought him in touch with much sin and sorrow. They saw how he took the troubles of others to himself, and wondered how he could bear them all. However tired he might be, almost certainly before dinner was over the father's face would lighten and he would begin a funny story garnered from the day's experience.

THE FATHER

III

His daughter, Mary, says that one of the most vivid impressions of her childhood was of her father — “fighting the devil.” Many a time in the evening he would come in and sink down into a chair and, looking across at Mrs. Bryan, exclaim, “Well, I have certainly been fighting the devil hard today, and sometime we are going to run him out of Birmingham.”

Little Mary would look up, with wide-eyed wonder at her father. “What a man father is!” thought the youngster. “He has been fighting the devil today.” She could see her father scrapping with old Satan himself, and the fight always ended with Satan taking to his heels and father chasing him. Some day father would actually run him all the way out of Birmingham. Then Mary would gather the younger brothers around her and they would talk about that father of theirs, “who actually had fought the devil.”

There was one thing, however, Mary could not understand about her father. Why was it that he was always going and coming, when other children’s fathers had time to sit on the front porch and spend long hours with their children? One day she asked him, “Father, why can’t you stay with us here on the porch until bedtime? Why do you always have to run off and leave us? We love you so and wish you could stay with us.”

Brother Bryan took his little girl into his arms and hugged and kissed her, and sitting there on the steps he told her how the “Lord’s work” was different and harder than any other work, and that any man who did it well had to give up many pleasures which others could enjoy. “Mary, I would love to stay with you, but I have to go now for Jesus’ sake.”

Years later the grown woman writing of her father says, “I know now that these never-ceasing journeys were part of the active life for God which he has always led.”

His children will never forget how all the good things which ever came into their home were gifts of God. He wished each one to feel that it was God who did all things for them. When

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he came in bringing some present for his boys and girl, or as they sat around the table loaded with good things to eat, frequently he would say, "See, children, what the Lord has sent you. I prayed today that He would help us and He has." One of the children grown to maturity says, "I always felt that he had met the Lord in person and that God had done this particular thing for him."

IV

Busy with all his varied labors, Brother Bryan never had time to play very much with his children, but he took time to be always interested in their activities. As a father he was gentle but firm, very positive but never arbitrary; he understood how to reason with the mischievous boys and to point out their errors, believing that to say "do" was more effective than to say "don't."

Brother Bryan was a father who knew it was good for boys to keep busy. When each son was old enough, he was started out as a newsboy to deliver papers, and the son's earnings were brought home to the mother to help with the family expenses and start savings accounts for the coming college days. The boys were taught that any kind of honest work is honorable, and the five have worked at a variety of jobs.

The father was especially interested in the education of his children. He usually himself took the children to school the first day and from that day he was continually planning their education. He knew personally all the teachers of his six children, and through the school year he visited their schoolrooms. It was quite an event in a schoolroom when Brother Bryan paid his visits. He was one father all the children recognized, and the boys and girls recognizing him glanced quickly at the Bryan child, sometimes to the confusion of the little fellow who was made so conspicuous. When the reports came home at the end of the term he carefully looked over each card, commending for good work here and inquiring about the reason for a poor grade there. If a child was having difficulty in some subject, the father carefully arranged to have a tutor to help get him over the difficult part.

THE FATHER

Through the years Brother Bryan's interest in the education of his children has never lagged. Today all six have their college degrees; the daughter is a graduate of Agnes Scott College, two sons are graduates of Washington and Lee University, two hold degrees from the University of South Carolina and one from Hampden-Sydney College. His two preacher sons have also had an additional three years' work in Columbia Theological Seminary. "College degrees for all six of us are a tribute to his and mother's diligence and sacrifice for our education," writes Thomas Bryan.

V

THE Bryan children grew naturally into the work of the church. Their father had a children's organization, called the "Busy Bees," which met every Saturday afternoon. Brother Bryan was always the "busiest bee" of all, for often the helpers failed to come and he was left alone with forty or more children. He sang the church hymns with this group of boys and girls, taught them patiently the catechism, and reviewed with them the Sunday school lessons for three or four preceding Sundays. Brother Bryan felt that, especially for the child without religious training in the home, the brief period spent on Sunday morning in the church school was inadequate religious training. In his own way on these Saturday afternoons of his earlier years in Birmingham, he tried to supplement the work of his Sunday school. He always had a great time with the boys and girls, even when every helper failed to come. His own children were members of his "Busy Bee" organization, and today look back upon it as one of their earliest impressions of the church.

His boys were put to work to help him gather in his congregations for the Thursday prayer meeting or the Sunday services. The lads had their rounds to make Thursday afternoon on their bicycles, ringing a doorbell and tarrying long enough to say, "Father says, we are going to have prayer meeting tonight and he hopes you won't forget to come."

Brother Bryan has always made successful use of little printed handbills, when he has some special service at his church. The

boys were useful in scattering dodgers far and wide over the neighborhood to advertise their father's services. Thus in many ways the children felt they had a part in their father's "work for God."

On Sundays Brother Bryan believed that every member of the household should be up and ready for Sunday school and the church services. The children were never too young to attend the regular church service. Often the little fellows fell asleep in the pew or on their mother's lap, but the Bryan children always went to church. "It is a habit, early acquired, from which it would be hard to break away even if we wished to do so," is the way one son expresses it today.

The same boy recalls how one Sunday all, except the father, were quarantined because of diphtheria in the home. No one except Brother Bryan could go to church, but the manse was at that time located next door to the church. It was midsummer and the windows were all up, so Brother Bryan arranged the chairs for the children before an open window of his home, and the little folks looked across into a church window, joined in singing the hymns, and entered as much as possible into the worship from their vantage point across the way.

The Sunday afternoons were planned by the father, even though most of the time Mrs. Bryan was the one to whom was left the execution of the details. Before anyone could go out to play after dinner, Bible stories must be read, verses memorized, the catechisms studied, and "Sunday books," such as Pilgrim's Progress, and the Sunday school papers, read. The mother watched over the Sunday afternoons, for the father was busy visiting hospitals, preaching at numerous mission stations, conducting funerals, and drumming up his evening congregation.

VI

THE deepest impression upon most of the children came from around the family altar. Just as regular as breakfast and supper came, regardless of who the guest might be or how hurried Brother Bryan was, he had family worship before they left the table.

THE FATHER

The father read a portion of God's Word, then they all stood together around the table while he poured out his heart to God. Sometimes the younger children were so tired from their play that their little heads fell sleepily over on the table as the father unhurriedly read the Bible passage, and when the prayer was over he would pick them up and carry them to bed.

They never forgot those prayers at the family altar. The father prayed very definitely for certain things, and time and time again, before many days had passed, they heard him thank God for answering the very request which they had heard him make but a short time before.

One son, today in the insurance business, writes: "His faith to my mind has been remarkable. It has been a common occurrence at our house to see the Providence of God working in one way or another. Father in the family circle would make supplication to God to grant a request, if it were His holy will, and on occasions too numerous to count, his requests have by some means or other been granted."

Brother Bryan's first ambition for his children was that the five sons be preachers and the daughter a missionary. The boys were always his "little preachers" and Mary his "little missionary." Today one son, Thomas Claudius, is pastor of the Maryland Avenue Presbyterian Church of Baltimore, Maryland, and the youngest of the family, Harry Haywood, is a Presbyterian missionary to Japan, but the others have not seen fit to be either ministers or missionaries.

The minister's son writes of the father's influence on his life: "An early impression was my father's devotion to his Lord and his Church. It was almost a consuming passion. Many times have I noticed a little piece of paper on his desk in the morning on which was written an outline of his day's work. The plan usually contained such items as prayer, the name of some person whom he was hoping to win for Christ, one or two hospitals which he hoped to visit, preaching engagements, and often some benevolent cause of the church, for which he hoped to secure some financial help."

The missionary son in Japan will be sure to tell you, in his memories of his father, how during the days of poverty, when there were six children to feed and educate, father supported a native worker in Mexico at the cost of twenty-five dollars a month. Every child Brother Bryan has followed with interest out into his chosen work. He writes to them constantly when they are separated, even though it be but a postal card with a brief message, "Proverbs 29: 18, Father," or as one day when Brother Bryan had received a letter praising a sermon of one of his preacher sons, he wrote hurriedly on the back of the letter in pencil: "Dear Son, Do not let anything discourage you. This is Thursday A.M. Colder than usual. Pray for us. Affectionately, Father." The children know how busy father is, and his brief messages are always full of meaning.

Beside the minister and missionary, the other children have taken their places in life as follows: Mary Clayton has her own home in Birmingham as the wife of a physician, Dr. L. M. Winn; John Edwards is the Superintendent of the Public Schools of Bessemer, Alabama; James Howze is in the building and loan business in Birmingham, and Augustin Clayton is in the insurance and investment business at Shreveport, Louisiana.*

Upon every child has been left the impress of a godly father and mother. The eldest son writes: "His example has been of great spiritual and moral benefit in influencing my whole life. The habits formed have been lasting, and although my father will not leave any earthly goods to his children, the influence of an unselfish consecrated life will remain. It is a rich heritage to be a son of such a father."

*In 1951 Thomas Bryan is pastor of the George W. Lee Memorial Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Harry is no longer a missionary to Japan, but for reasons of health has returned to become the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Bessemer, Alabama; Mary Clayton is still in Birmingham; John Edwards is Superintendent of the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind at Talladega; James still is in the same business in Birmingham; and Augustin, while still in the insurance business, is now in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

CHAPTER NINE
THE UNCONVENTIONAL PREACHER

I

S AID a prominent Birmingham lawyer, "He never will be a preacher." Of course not, Brother Bryan will never be the conventional preacher. His sermons will never be homiletic models, but then, if preaching is proclaiming a message, carrying "good news," making Christ known to men, getting a hearing for the Gospel, he is pre-eminently a preacher.

Many a week has passed in which he has had no single audience gathered into a church building which would number more than one hundred and fifty, but, if one begins to count up the varied groups to which he has brought "good news" of salvation, why he has preached perhaps to fifty or more congregations, varying in size from five or six firemen seated around a fire engine to the congregation gathered at his church on Sunday morning. His preaching has not stopped with the word spoken in the presence of a gathered group of listeners, for in late years he has sent each week from six to eleven messages out over the radio to all who will listen far and wide. One today may wonder if, in number of broadcasts each week, Bryan of Birmingham does not hold the record as the world's most frequent radio preacher. He also values the printed message, for through the circulation of newspapers the Gospel may be carried into many a place where a preacher will never enter. Each Saturday evening the *Birmingham Post* has printed his picture and a sermon for the week, and besides he is a contributor, and it is always a sermon, to more than a dozen papers. Three labor magazines carry regularly his sermons, not labor messages but simple Bible sermons. It is true of him, as was said of his Master long ago, "The common people heard him gladly."

RELIGION IN SHOES

In the first century, preaching was unconventional. Men were excited over the "good news" in Christ. Every Christian was more or less a preacher. The message was delivered as men sat at tables, as they walked along the Roman highways together, through long days and nights as they sat together on the slow-moving Mediterranean sailing vessels, about the campfires of soldiers, in homes, marketplaces, wherever one would listen. To them it was glorious good news. They would tell it on every opportunity. Brother Bryan is of kindred spirit to those first-century preachers. His soul is overwhelmed with this good news of God and he must tell it to any who will listen.

II

WHEN the days so full of activity and perhaps thirty talks a week, how can he possibly have anything to say? No man has ever had more unique methods of study and preparation. To begin with, Brother Bryan had a splendid education in his youth and he is constantly drawing from a retentive memory upon all the knowledge gathered through the years.

He is a man of one book. His Bible is the source of all his sermonic material. When the Bible message fails to grip the hearts of mankind, preachers like Bryan will no longer retain their audiences. Still that simple Bible message about God and love and Christ and righteousness, when it comes out of a heart and life like Brother Bryan's, has a most winning power over men and women. God still speaks out of that Book to the human heart.

"To study to preach the Gospel," he once wrote in reply to a question about how he prepared sermons, "is empty, is worthless, unless the study is saturated with prayer. Without God we can do nothing. Personally I never open the Bible without prayer, and of course, I never prepare a sermon without prayer. I feel the Holy Spirit guides us in the truth and I must know the truth." He has through the years done most of his studying in the early morning hours, while others are still in bed. Day by day he rises at five o'clock to spend an hour or more reading again and again the Bible, with two constant helps, a concord-

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ance and a one-volume Bible dictionary. He has read the Bible so often that now it is a living book, with those characters of long ago moving just as vividly before him as his own sons, Tom or Harry. In these very early morning hours he does most of his studying by, as he says, "talking with God."

He is a constant student by telephone, sometimes indeed to the annoyance of the more impatient brethren of the ministry. Something in the Bible has puzzled him. He hasn't gotten it clearly as yet. He reaches for his telephone and calls a minister in another part of the city to ask what he thinks of the passage. There by telephone he listens, "Yes, — Yes, — now what? Yes — Brother, you have given me a message for the city today. I thank you and let us now pray."

About a mile away from his home, in the beautiful Highland section, there lived for many years a successful mining engineer who had come over from Scotland. He was a great Bible student and became a fast friend of the minister of the Third Presbyterian Church. Both were early risers and for years between the hours of five and six each morning Brother Bryan called by telephone this old-fashioned Scottish elder to talk over some Bible passage and have a word of prayer. Let a minister take a ride with Brother Bryan and almost immediately he will begin to pump him about a Bible text or character. "Tomorrow I must talk about Timothy over WAPI radio broadcasting station. Now while we are riding along here together you tell me all you know about Timothy." By the time they arrive at the destination the talk has taken shape for the radio address of the next morning.

Usually he follows some definite method in his studying. At one time he will go through a book of the Bible and use it for a week in many of his talks; again he will study some great Bible words, — help, grace, sin, salvation, — looking up references in the concordance and stringing texts together like beads; at other times he will take some doctrinal truth — regeneration, sanctification, or holiness — and bring together all the thoughts and Bible passages he can gather on these subjects; many a time it is a Bible character, with the ups and downs which come in

human life; and whatever the study may be it is illumined by an intimate knowledge of everyday life.

Brother Bryan says, "I study every hour. I am studying when I look at you, when I meet you at the door, when you enter the church and when you go out." His method of preparing a Sunday morning sermon, he says, is to rehearse it all week long. Early in the week he selects a Bible passage for the next Sunday. Then on Monday he begins to get ready. He meditates on this passage from five to six o'clock, sees a little truth, starts out by preaching it to a group of firemen at the fire station, gives it again at noon in the streetcar barn. "By the time I rehearse my sermon at five or six places, I begin to see some light on it." He keeps preaching it, looking up references which may throw light upon it, and finally, by preaching, the sermon has grown into a Sunday morning message. He is the only preacher of whom I know who preaches himself into a sermon.

III

HE NEVER despises the small audience. They tell that once a big religious convention was in session in Birmingham. The morning program was on the Church's duty of Evangelism, a subject in which Brother Bryan was deeply interested. He came and sat through a morning session of reports, surveys, and addresses without end. Finally about noon he slipped out, left them all behind to eat their lunch and hear more speeches, and hurried over to a nearby factory.

Here he found a man he had kept on his prayer list for months. They sat down on a pile of lumber. Brother Bryan ate a little from the man's lunch pail. They talked about Christ, prayed together, and finally the man gave his heart to the Lord. He came back to the convention hall beaming and, grasping the arm of a close friend, he whispered something like this: "I just couldn't stand it any longer. We talked all morning about saving men in masses, and that is all right, but I couldn't help thinking about Jess Lambert in the factory over yonder. He came to my church once in a while but was not a Christian. I have been

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wanting to talk with him for months, so I slipped off and spent the lunch hour with him, and Jess is saved. I think now, with God's help, I can stand the afternoon conference on soul winning."

One should see him in action with three or four firemen around him at some fire station. He takes his seat in their midst, the men pull up their chairs, and he preaches to them just as earnestly as to a congregation. The firemen listen intently and lean over lest they might miss a single word. No group is ever too small. If he has time, or can make time, he will talk about Christ to any who will listen. Is not this also preaching?

IV

No ONE knows better how to drum up a congregation and to take advantage of every occasion. He became a preacher of city-wide influence largely through his numerous services in schools, shops, and factories. To read a list of his preaching places one might think that it was part of the city directory, for it would read: railroad shops, one meeting each week: Finley Southern Machine and Pipe Shops, Finley Southern Blacksmith Shops, Finley Southern Car Repair Shops, Louisville and Nashville Railroad Shops, Seaboard Air Line Machine and Repair Shops; iron and steel mills and foundries, from once a week to as often as possible but without definite appointments: Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company, National Cast Iron Pipe Company, Stockham Pipe and Fitting Company, Joubert-Goslin Machine and Foundry Company, American Cast Iron Pipe Company, Hardie-Tynes Company, Ingal Iron Works, Caldwell-Watson Iron and Machine Company, Birmingham Machine and Foundry Company, Bessemer Pipe Works; factories of various types, once a week or as often as possible: Liberty Overall Factory, Phillip-Lester Overall Factory, Houston Biscuit Company, American Bakeries, Martin Biscuit Company, Continental Gin Company; government employees: United States Post Office to clerks and carriers, Birmingham Police Headquarters, all City Fire Stations; public utilities: Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Company shops, car barns, Bell Telephone Company; prisons: city

and county jails, and at times Kilby State Prison at Montgomery; many schools and colleges of the city, but especially two girls' schools, the Loulie Compton Seminary and the Misses Howard's School for Girls, twice a week each.

It is rather a wide stretch from the Negro stripped to his waist, the black skin shining like ebony, in one of the steel mills, to the cultured and fashionable young women in the exclusive school up on Highland Avenue, but somehow he has the ability to bridge the gap, or is it not he but his Lord, of whom he always speaks to every group?

The principal of one of the girls' schools tells that there is no visitor quite so welcomed by these cultured young women as Brother Bryan. When they see him coming, they run to meet him and struggle with one another for the privilege of taking his coat and hat. He tells the girls of his experience down in the city with men and women and children. Perhaps he has found some little waif, half-naked, that very morning. He talks plainly to them about the sins and temptations of young women, and especially about the things which may tempt them that very day. Then he will pray with them very directly, perhaps a prayer like this, "O God, don't let us cheat today on our examinations. Help us to remember our mothers and fathers before we do anything wrong. Don't let us be 'sassy and mean' to our teachers. Help us not to talk about one another." They know they can always count on him. He comes for his fifteen minutes and he stops when the fifteen minutes are up. He will be there rain or shine. One day the sleet came down and made it dangerous to move over the ice. They telephoned Brother Bryan that they would not expect him to come, for it was too slippery to get over the ice, but he replied that he would be there on time. Then the girls looked out that cold icy morning and there was the beloved old man, on his hands and knees, climbing over the ice to talk with them. Of course they love him, and they will be better wives and mothers because they have come in contact with him. Religion will be more real to them for they have seen it coming to them in the shoes of service.

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A president of one of the leading eastern colleges for women not long ago asked a young lady from a wealthy home in Birmingham, "Do you know a minister whom they call 'Brother Bryan' in your city?"

"Why, of course," she replied. "Everyone in Birmingham knows Brother Bryan. Mother and I have frequently driven him around in our car on his errands of mercy. We often leave our own church up in the Highlands and slip down to his little church to hear him preach." Then, rather hesitatingly, she continued, "You know he is the only preacher who has ever had any influence on my life."

V

"BROTHER BRYAN, what do you think of this new invention, the radio?" asked a friend when the new wonder came on the market.

"It is of the devil," replied the minister of the Third Presbyterian Church. As usual, at first he did not believe in the new scientific creation. He was running true to custom in this, for he never believes in a new invention when it first appears. He is always fearful that in some way it will harm the spiritual life of men and women. He had his doubts about the telephone, and then he discovered that the telephone was the greatest way on earth to keep in touch with men and women. At first he was sure that the automobile was a product of the evil one, and now he sits in his car a good part of every day. His auto has become as necessary to him as his shoes. It was the same with "That new-fangled radio! It would keep folks from church and no telling what they might hear over it." For a long time his friends tried to get him to a microphone, but he left the new contraption alone. Other preachers might broadcast their sermons, but he would speak to a congregation whom he could see.

In 1927 his thousands of friends sent him on the trip of his life to Palestine. He came back from the land which his Master had trod overflowing with gratitude to those who had made this trip possible for him. He must show his gratitude to the people

by speaking on all occasions about the Bible lands, which so recently he had visited. "Brother Bryan, you must tell of your trip over the radio," urged his friends. "The radio is not for me, but for those high-stepping stylish preachers," was his usual reply.

Gradually, however, he began to weaken. One morning the broadcasting station called him to request that he speak to his many friends about the trip to Palestine at eight-thirty on Saturday morning. "You owe it to Birmingham, to the folks who sent you to Palestine," urged the operator. He yielded. He would try it once, and so with many doubts he went down to the broadcasting rooms. It was not so terrible. Really, in imagination he saw thousands of listeners out across the city. He finished and went home.

The telephone rang, "Brother Bryan, we sure did enjoy that talk over the radio," said a voice, and then another and another with a similar greeting. Some letters and cards came thanking him for the message. He was back at the radio station the next Saturday. His talks were popular. He proved to have a remarkable radio voice, which carried as clearly as if he were in the room. No longer was the radio "of the devil," it was now the Lord's own gift.

Today he jumps at every opportunity to speak a word by radio. Every police and fire station in Birmingham has a receiving set. If he is to broadcast at some unannounced hour he calls by telephone No. 1 Fire Station, and the men there call every fire station in the city to announce that Brother Bryan is on the air. Sometimes these loyal firemen, when their friend is to speak over a long-range broadcast, will call the fire stations all the way down the line for three hundred and fifty miles to New Orleans, and hundreds of fire stations will have groups of men listening to the preacher in Birmingham with his simple but helpful message.

He is completely converted now. "The radio is God's greatest gift to us in this century," he says, "and it is the opportunity of my life to speak eight or nine times a week to an unseen but earnest audience."

Many messages come to him from the unseen hearers. Some listener on a sickbed gives directions to call him for the funeral

when death comes. The sick, the weary, the tired, the burdened, hear him and come to him for spiritual encouragement, or when unable because of infirmity send requests for him to visit and pray with them. Some cultured woman calls and asks to be received into the church, confessing that she was converted while she listened to his message over the radio. He must study all the time for these radio audiences. He was sixty-eight years of age when first he spoke into a microphone, rather old to learn new ways, but says he, "The radio is the greatest factor which has come into my life."

This constant speaking over the radio takes quite a bit of time and energy with all the numerous demands upon him. He took an unusual way to solve one difficulty. For years he had been a more or less regular contributor to fifteen newspapers and periodicals of one sort and another. Now he gets a stenographer to take down certain of his radio addresses and these are sent to the papers. He never looks over the stenographic report. If it is correct, it is that much the better. If there is some glaring error in the report, why he reasons most folks will not know the difference and stenographers are pretty accurate. Sometimes he is quoted as saying most unusual things. One day his sermon appeared in the *Evening Post*, "As we were traveling north in Palestine there to our right stood Mt. McKinley."

VI

THERE is a picturesqueness in his style. One Sunday morning his sermon was upon the passage which told of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. In his humble way he did not hesitate, very reverently, to act partially the scene before his people. Telling the beautiful story in John's Gospel he slipped his coat off at the point where Jesus laid aside his outer robe, fastened his handkerchief about his waist, and, as he told of how Jesus stooped to wash the disciples' feet, he stepped from the pulpit and knelt at the feet of a poor man sitting on the front seat. It was the natural way for him to tell the story, for the Bible narrative lived again in him.

He was speaking of the prayer in Gethsemane. "Come with me," he said, "prayerfully and thoughtfully to the Mount of Olives, hardly a Sabbath day's journey from Jerusalem. On this Mount, Christ prayed all night. It was there He slept in the cool and even chilly air with the grass for a mattress, a stone for a pillow, and the canopy of heaven for his blanket."

The Bible passage is from the book of Acts, where Paul was stoned at Lystra. It is very realistic: "Timothy must have walked up to Paul's side, stooped over, and assisted him to his feet. 'I am so glad that you can stand, because I feared that you would never revive here. I thought you were dead. Let's go seek a more comfortable place and nourishment for your worn body.' Paul must have looked up into his face and said, 'I certainly haven't much time to tarry, because I am going right down to Derbe and preach the same Gospel of faith in Christ, as much as in me is.'"

The Bible is the source of all his messages. He takes it as it is, vividly gives the story or message, applies it to the actual problems of his varied audiences, and leaves the results to God. He has faith, born of long experience, that the Word speaks to human hearts. It is an old-fashioned Gospel which he proclaims, centering in the death of Christ as the atonement for sin. From his long and varied contact with men, he knows human nature like a violinist knows his instrument; and as the musician takes the harmony and lays it on the violin string, so Bryan, the preacher, takes the message of God's redeeming love in Christ and lays it on the heartstrings of men and women, and time and again they have yielded the melody of a new life.

But his greatest sermon is the sermon of his daily life. It is because men know him, have seen him tried, have looked upon his faith at work, that they so eagerly listen to his simple messages. Religion has here expressed itself in life.

CHAPTER TEN
THE SYMPATHETIC PASTOR

I

IT is as pastors that ministers come closest to the people of their parishes. The word spoken from the pulpit points the way of duty, admonishes the erring, and inspires to finer living all who hear, but it is in those sacred hours of trouble, sorrow, and joy that ministers are admitted into the inner shrine of human souls. If one will patiently wait long enough, there will come an hour in every home of the congregation when the man of God is needed. A great pastor is he who is able to make the most of such opportunities, for, if then he knows how to measure up, he binds his people to him by the strongest ties.

Measured by such standards, Brother Bryan has proven a most successful pastor. He not only has gripped the hearts of the people of his own church, but his pastoral ministrations have reached far beyond the confines of his little parish to embrace Birmingham itself, and especially has he through the years become the pastor at large of that vast unchurched group which is found in every large city. Instinctively those who have no church affiliation call upon him in those hours when, careless though they may have been, they find a need for the man of God. Partially, it is because of all the clergymen of the city he, with his forty-five years of service, is the most widely known; but years alone cannot explain his influence, for pre-eminently he is the pastor of the sympathetic heart. He knows how to love people into the kingdom of God's love.

He never loses the individual in the crowd. Each has his own problem, his own burden, his own joy, and Brother Bryan cares for the individual man. He has learned long ago that men are won to God not in mass formation, but one by one, as soon as

some sympathetic soul reveals God to them. Dealing with the individual, hundreds of them seemingly derelicts, he has been able to keep a remarkable spiritual optimism. He has unbounded faith in the sinner for whom Christ died.

II

TO THE people of his own congregation he has always given his very best. One of his most faithful members tells of how years ago when both the husband and little daughter were sick of lingering diseases, "he came to our house every day for five years." No one in his congregation could be too poor, too ignorant, or too erring to get beneath his best pastoral efforts.

Through the years he has not been too busy to make pastoral calls. He always goes when asked, no matter what the occasion may be. In the years gone by he kept the pony and cart continually on the go, and for years now his automobile has been constantly on the job. No one, however, could accuse him of being a conventional "front-door-bell-ringing" clergyman, for he knows how to make his visits count for God. His advice on pastoral visitations is very simple: "When you pay a pastoral visit talk very little about yourself and a great deal about Jesus."

In recent years he has pressed into his pastoral service every possible new invention of this generation. His telephone is his assistant, for with that he can keep in close touch with many more people than if in his busy life he had to wait to call upon them in their homes. Each day he will probably make twenty or more pastoral calls by telephone. Each telephone pastoral call has its essential spiritual note, for invariably he prays with the party at the other end of the line. The advent of the automobile speeded up his pastoral work, for now he could move far more swiftly over the city than with his horse and buggy. Even the radio has aided him in his pastoral work, for his six or more broadcasts each week carry his voice into thousands of homes where he could never otherwise be able to enter. He instinctively knows how to make these brief devotionals so intimate that the

scattered listeners feel that Brother Bryan is in the room with them, gathering the little circle together for family prayers.

Each year his congregation observes the first Sunday of June as the anniversary of his entering upon his only pastorate. The affection of pastor and people after the long years is beautiful. From the program of this anniversary celebration in 1931, a short letter from Brother Bryan and the response of his people is here printed.

“MY DEAR PEOPLE AND FRIENDS:

“My heart goes out to God these days in gratitude and praise for the rare, God-given privilege of being your pastor for forty-two years. To me, this day is one of heart searching and re-dedication to such an holy task — from Christ. I love you all — also this city, and I beg your prayers, your patience, and your help as I try to do more for Jesus in the future.

“Your Pastor and Friend,

“J. A. BRYAN.”

Under the letter was this statement from the congregation:

“Today, the hearts of this congregation are filled with love and gratitude for our dearly loved friend and pastor, Brother Bryan, who is entering the forty-third year of ministry with us, in Christ’s name.

“In all these years he has never failed one of us as friend, adviser, comforter, and leader in the deeper spiritual life. He is truly our shepherd. In our sorrows and trials he has been our tender, loving, sympathizing, understanding, prayerful friend, and our blessings have filled his heart with joy.

“His daily life of love and sacrifice, and his deep consecration to the Master is the greatest call to faithful service a people could have. We thank our Heavenly Father for such a man!

“To Brother Bryan we wish again to renew our pledge of love, and pray the years to come may be the richest and fullest of such a ministry. God bless this wonderful man, is the prayer of the Third Presbyterian Church.”

III

THE hour of trouble is the opportunity of the man of God. Brother Bryan has always kept the study door at the church on

Twenty-second Street wide open to all who are perplexed. He believes that his Christ is able to help any man in any circumstance.

But not only does he keep his study door ajar, he goes out to those who cannot come to him. Before the city grew so large, he had regular hours to visit all the hospitals. For some time he has not been able to visit so systematically, for the population has increased far beyond the ability of one man to visit all the sick in the many hospitals.

When death enters a home, almost without exception people wish some minister of religion to be with them and perform the last sacred rites for the departed. One of the older undertakers of the city can tell many stories of Brother Bryan's ministry of comfort. There was the terrible smallpox epidemic of years ago, when some ministers were themselves ill, and people were panic-stricken before the dread disease, but Brother Bryan kept quietly on conducting the funerals and helping to cover the graves after the last words had been spoken in the cemeteries. In 1918 during the deadly influenza plague, the weather was bitterly cold, thousands were desperately ill, there were more funerals than the city had ever witnessed, and through those days Brother Bryan kept on ministering to the dying and burying the dead. One day he had eight funerals, and several times there were more than five. He put on a heavy overcoat, an extra pair of wool socks, and wrapped his shoes up in old cloth, and stood hour after hour before the fast-filling graves.

It has been estimated that Brother Bryan has conducted or assisted in thirty funerals a month for twenty years. One beautiful and healthful summer week he went five days without a single funeral, and he simply couldn't understand it. He had never gone so long in a quarter of a century without standing by a newly opened grave.

He conducts a funeral in his own individual way, varying it to suit the home into which death has entered. He says, "One has to pray a great deal before he can glorify God by conducting what men call a 'funeral.' Jesus never called such a service a funeral, for He always broke up such services by raising the

dead." He hopes at every funeral not only to bring comfort but to reach some unconverted person for Christ and God. To do this he relies implicitly on the Word of God, memorizing passage after passage from his Bible and quoting these passages to suit the individual need. He is always careful to stand where the living can hear, even those who may have gathered on the porch or in the yard. Frequently in the midst of the funeral service he asks those to raise their hands who will accept Christ as their Saviour and seek to lead a Christian life. He never looks to see who responds, but next day perhaps someone will telephone that at the funeral service yesterday, "I accepted Christ and am now trying to lead a Christian life."

Rich and poor, ignorant and learned, churchmen and non-churchmen wish him to be at their funeral services. Almost always, if a minister of the city is requested to have another clergyman assist in a funeral, the assisting minister is the pastor of the little Third Presbyterian Church.

Of all groups, however, he is the minister to the poor and unloved. Through forty-five years it has been no uncommon sight to see a lone hearse on the streets of Birmingham. There are no attendants, but inside the hearse a cheap casket, and seated beside the driver the well-known figure of Brother Bryan. Often the coffin within has been purchased by the clergyman, and he will pay for it in installments by the week, for at a deathbed he has promised some poor soul that he would not fail to see that there was a decent burial, and he cannot fail that trust.

IV

WHEN a young man and a young woman decide to start down the road of life together as man and wife, they usually seek their favorite clergyman for the wedding ceremony. Ordinarily it is the pastor of the church of which one or both are members. When a minister of a congregation of less than five hundred members is called upon to officiate at some six thousand weddings in forty-three years, it clearly indicates that this pastor has a hold on many hearts.

Brother Bryan has numbers of weddings throughout the week, but the wedding ceremonies seem to come in clusters on Saturdays. When you look through the careful record which Mrs. Bryan has kept since 1921, you see that many a Saturday there have been from five to eight wedding ceremonies at which her husband has officiated. The reason that so many couples come on Saturday is that often the prospective husband labors all week and Saturday afternoon is the only free afternoon, and then the Sunday following gives the bride and groom one free day together before the new husband goes back to work on Monday morning. Brother Bryan understands the situation and the only time you can be sure of finding him at home is Saturday afternoon while he waits for the brides and grooms.

His wedding fees go almost entirely to support his charitable enterprises. He never likes to miss a wedding, for then there will be just that much less with which to care for his poor. His fees vary, although he always tells them, when they ask, that the legal fee is two dollars — the amount which is asked for an official performing a civil ceremony. The smallest fees which he has ever received were a soup-bone on one occasion, one dozen eggs on another, and on still another forty cents. Once the new husband gave a one dollar bill and when the bride saw the amount she immediately added two dollars more. He has never received more than \$50.00, and most of the time the fees vary from two to five or ten dollars.

When couples come to get married he may ask most unusual questions. If he is a bit suspicious, he may look the man over and ask if he drinks. Should the reply be in the affirmative, he will tell the man to go elsewhere, "for I won't marry any girl to a whisky jug." He may ask the couple, "Do you believe in God and the Bible?" Unless the answer is "Yes," he will tell them to go somewhere else, for "I cannot marry those who do not believe in God."

He begins his wedding ceremony usually with a charge to go to church and to prayer meeting, to pray and to read the Bible, and to establish a Christian home. Often these charges from the

elderly minister to the young bride and groom are touchingly beautiful, like the advice of an old father to his own children.

His questions are brief and very simple. After the charge he usually begins: "In the Bible the right hand is the covenant hand. Now join right hands. Will you, my brother, have thy sister, whose hand you hold, to be your lawful wife, and will you promise to be to her a loving and faithful husband as long as you both shall live?"

A beautiful prayer follows. He invokes God's rich blessing upon the man and wife as they there begin life together. His phrases flow in Bible language and imagery, like a true benediction from heaven itself. The ceremony is soon over and the couple are gone, but they still remember Brother Bryan who officiated for them in that sacred hour.

V

AS A PASTOR he considers himself the shepherd of his sheep, but he does not forget to feed the lambs. He has always loved the children and they have responded to his love. "Mother, he always comes to us when we are in trouble," said a little invalid girl.

A judge in the city courts of Birmingham tells how one day long ago Brother Bryan came into his Sunday school class, and, putting his arms around the only two lads present that day, said, "Boys, won't you give your lives to Jesus, line up as soldiers of the cross, and live for Him?"

The judge, who is now an honored elder in his church, says, "And we did."

Any day you might pass his church and find a group of little dirty waifs sitting on the sidewalk or church steps with Testaments out busily looking up Bible verses for Brother Bryan. No one has ever thought that the pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church was above the reach of the children of the congregation.

He enters gloriously into the spirit of Christmas with the boys and girls. On his hospital rounds at Christmastime he carries little twigs from Christmas trees to place in the hands of the suffering children. One might almost call him the "Santa Claus

Man," when on Christmas morning before the peep of day he packs his car full of all kinds of grotesque packages, stockings bulging with oranges and apples, a doll sticking out here, or a train in another, and is off like Saint Nick to homes where he knows there will be little Christmas cheer. At a door he knocks and announces, "Santa Claus has come to somebody here," and then is off again.

Perhaps a card is found pinned to the stocking: "God sent Santa Claus to you, little boy. He sent Jesus to you, too, on Christmas day. Santa Claus wants you to love God, and be a little Christian, and give your life to Jesus."

"I like for people," he says, "to give me dolls so that I can give them away. I like to take the prettiest doll to some little girl who has never mothered one. I remember one little girl's joy over the first doll she ever had, which somebody was good enough to send through me. That little girl is a graduate of high school now, and thinking about making other children happy, and every time I see her she talks about that first Christmas doll."

CHAPTER ELEVEN
THE MINISTER CITIZEN

I

THE minister at the Third Presbyterian Church has never doubted that his first loyalty was to Jesus Christ, but he has never found anything in the profession of being a clergyman which would prevent him from being a citizen of his own city. The best interest of Birmingham has always been close to this preacher's heart. Brother Bryan, for almost half a century now, has been a power to reckon with in the social, moral, and political life of Birmingham. He believes that Christianity should make a clean city.

His unusual influence in the life of Birmingham has come through long years of interest in public affairs and service for the common good. Like most influences it began in the small and gradually expanded into the larger. When he first came to the city, he felt an interest in every force that made or marred humanity, especially the boys and girls. The saloons, gambling dens, and houses of ill repute discovered in him a deadly enemy, although for the individual, even the individual who lived by such immoral practices, he was always a friend. He loved all men, bad and good, but he hated evil — hated it with all the fervor of his soul — and since both love and hatred were so very real, he held the affection of bad men, although they knew he despised their business. He has always dared to enter any saloon and denounce the business and then pray earnestly for the saloon keeper before he left. Boldness, mingled with love and stamped with conviction and integrity, have made him through the years an increasing power in the city's life.

Early in his ministry in Birmingham he began regularly to go into the courtroom. Before very long he was praying in the civil

courts. Now for many years a number of the judges of the varied courts of the city invite him to open every new session of the court with prayer. He showed an interest in all officials way back in his early ministry. For years now he has wedded and buried most of the policemen and firemen of the city, and, wherever these officers may be, Brother Bryan is sure to visit them. The wards in the city hospital, where few ministers ever go, he has frequented. When the city was smaller, it was possible for him to stop at the bedside of each patient, but now, since he cannot stop to talk to all, he walks slowly among the sickbeds repeating aloud so that all may hear, "Jesus said, 'Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth. . . . God is our refuge and strength . . . I will not leave thee nor forsake thee . . .'" etc. Then he will stop and pray for the whole group gathered in a ward. He was among the number of the pioneers of social service who brought the first district nurse to Birmingham. Through the years, by showing an interest in every worthy civic enterprise, by lending a hand whenever possible, by standing fearlessly by those he felt were working for a better city, and especially by gaining the affection of the multitude of common folks, he has become an increasing factor working for righteousness in civic life.

II

BROTHER BRYAN understands the laboring man, and in turn they love and respect him. Birmingham, as a great industrial city, has perhaps more labor problems than any city in the South. Much of the labor is unionized. In many places union labor has broken with the organized church, but Brother Bryan has ever been able to hold the love of all classes of those who toil with their hands. He has literally grown up with the great mills of his native city. Long ago he began to preach at the noon hour to the small groups of workmen in the factories. Gradually the plants grew, and Brother Bryan kept on and widened his acquaintance with the workers. They called on him when in trouble. Those who had no church connection called on him

for wedding occasions and for funerals. When they lost their jobs in some period of depression, he helped them by the hundreds. He proved a friend in every time of need, and now there are thousands of toilers in Birmingham who would stick by Brother Bryan to the very last.

They have elected him to honorary membership in all kinds of unions. He probably is a member of more labor unions than any other man in the city. Some years ago the stage employees of Birmingham elected him to honorary membership in the International Alliance of Theater and Stage Employees of the Motion Pictures Operators in the United States and Canada. The Sunday following this election to membership Birmingham had one of her rare snowstorms, but twenty members of the union trudged through the snow to present him with his union card.

On his journey through Europe to Palestine a few years ago, the International Typographical Union of printers furnished him with a traveling card, entitling him to the friendship and good offices of all unions. Several times in Europe Brother Bryan used this card to decided advantage.

His unusual influence over labor is best seen in the fact that he contributes sermons to some five labor periodicals. In these sermons, which sometimes cover a page and a half of the paper, in the midst of discussion of union and labor problems, Brother Bryan says nothing about labor or capital, but simply preaches the Gospel of a Saviour and His message about how men should live. He has never found it necessary to truckle to either side to gain a hearing, and he would not hesitate to criticize both.

One remembers seeing him at a mass meeting for the unemployed in 1931. There were two thousand present, largely men without work. An official of the American Federation of Labor was to deliver the principal address. A United States congressman and several politicians were prominently seated on the platform. That night Brother Bryan was late, for it was prayer meeting night at his church. He arrived in the midst of the speaking and took an obscure seat on the platform. He was not permitted to remain there long, for someone noticing him came

to bring him to the seat beside the chairman. There he sat during the meeting, the profile of his tired face standing out in marked contrast with the group around him. Suffering and sympathy had chiseled on that face the finer marks of character. When the congressman rose to speak he put his hand upon Brother Bryan's shoulder and called him "Birmingham's most beloved citizen" and the unemployed toilers began to cheer. Many of those men might have held doubts about the American Federation of Labor, the United States Congress, but of one there was no doubt: the whole two thousand believed in the elderly minister. He closed that meeting with a prayer, as usual. The Christian religion had not here lost contact with the masses.

III

HE HAS always made much of inviting special delegations to his church for a service, and these delegations come. The policemen and firemen have regular times, when just as many as can get off from duty come to Brother Bryan's church in a body to worship. Often it is some group of laboring men who receive the invitations, and, while many of them may not get there for the particular service, they believe that Brother Bryan has an interest in their group.

Each year he gathers the newsboys for a special service. The boys usually bring two or three hundred of their number. Most often Brother Bryan preaches to them himself, but if one of his preacher sons, Thomas or Harry, happens to be at home, he will take the service. His own sons have sold and delivered papers in Birmingham, so that both father and sons have a personal interest in the spiritual life of these boys.

He had a service for the newsboys on July 28, 1929, and used for a subject, "Timothy, Paul's Son in the Faith." After telling the Bible story of Timothy, he brought his message to the boys sitting before him.

"Timothy seems a young man who could be trusted with great responsibility, and don't forget he was well qualified for the trust. Paul sent Timothy as a missionary to the Corinthians, to

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Macedonia, to Philippi. Timothy was urged by Paul to come to Rome and was trusted to visit the churches which Paul had established. He was trusted by his fellow man and he was qualified in Jesus Christ for the trust. Oh, to be qualified in Christ for a trust! I want you boys to think of this seriously. Boys are needed who can be trusted.

"The time has come and now is, when the Church must put its arms around our boys. They must be taught more of Jesus Christ. They need encouragement and help. When I was attending school in Raleigh, North Carolina, I knew a boy who was selling the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the daily paper of the town. He did this to defray his expenses at school. He grew to manhood and held the office of Secretary of the Navy and has done a great deal of ennobling and uplifting work for his country.

"This young man just put Christ first and the Church first in his life. Timothy put Christ first in his life, and Paul writes of him as one in whom he could trust. While he was there in that dark, dismal Roman prison, he writes to Timothy saying, 'Timothy, you know I have done nothing to be here and I am very uncomfortable. When I was taken captive at Carpus' house at Troas, I did not have time to get my coat and the parchments, the books. Will you go by Troas and get my coat? I am shuddering from the chill of the dungeon. Please don't forget the books, the parchments, the Bible, and come quickly to me.'

"Now, to you newspaper men and newsboys, I just want to tell you that God is trusting you. There are unlimited opportunities in your lives. Our lives are worthless unless they count for Jesus Christ. I may not have the eloquence of the Apostle Paul, nor the money of some rich man, but I can have just as much of the love of Jesus Christ in my heart. That is what I want you to think about. We hear so much about being successful, and getting to the top of the ladder in the business world. But, my dear friends, let us think about being true servants of Jesus Christ as was Paul and his beloved son in the faith, Timothy."

IV

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM of Birmingham has always claimed Dr. Bryan's interest. He has taught Bible classes and conducted chapel services in every type of school in Birmingham — medical, business, university, public, private, including those for the colored students.

For so many years he has shown an interest in the educational program of his city, that now it is the customary thing, when the Superintendent of Public Schools gathers together his fifteen hundred teachers for an inspirational meeting just before the school term begins, always to have Brother Bryan on the program. He strikes a spiritual note for the year's work of the teachers, and leads that great group of teachers in prayer for God's blessing as they begin the term. "But after all," says the Superintendent, "we do not have him for what he says, but for what he is. His presence brings a benediction upon our work."

With his wide influence among all classes, Brother Bryan has helped much in promoting the educational program of the city. Some issue involving the public schools is before the people to be decided by a popular vote, perhaps a bond issue for school improvements or a change in taxation for school purposes. Those interested in the development of education can send out many eloquent men to argue the question and explain the situation accurately to the people, but they do not always seem to secure many votes. Most of the time Brother Bryan sways more votes in favor of schools than any other speaker. He does not attempt to explain the situation, perhaps he has not studied it enough to understand all the details, but he knows enough about it to believe that it is for the good of the boys and girls of his city, so in his daily rounds of preaching and teaching, he speaks a good word for the measure. "Men, it is the thing to do for your boys and girls to vote for the school bill," he says. They pass the word along, "Brother Bryan says the new school law is all right." "Well, Bill, how are you going to vote about the schools?" one man asks another. "I don't know much about it, but I hear

Brother Bryan says it is the thing, so I guess I am for it," the friend replies. When the votes come in, Brother Bryan has had a big part in winning the election for the schools.

A paragraph from a letter of the Superintendent of Education to Brother Bryan follows: "Once more I find myself under obligation to you for the assistance you gave the Board of Education in getting the people to understand school conditions and to vote the two mill tax. Our splendid victory was discussed at the Board meeting yesterday and at the request of the Board I am writing to express to you personally our appreciation of the fine service you rendered." (April 4, 1931.)

V

THE FIGHTING SPIRIT of the Scot was up. A bill had passed the State legislature to submit to a referendum of the citizens the question of opening theaters and other places of amusement in Birmingham on Sunday. Brother Bryan was aroused, for he believed in one day of rest and worship. The preachers of the city met in a conference to plan a campaign to keep a sacred Sabbath. They called on Brother Bryan to pray. He bowed silently for a moment and then prayed this prayer: "O God, help us to live like Christ and fight like hell! Amen."

Then he went out to do his part in winning the campaign. Those who were advocating the open Sunday said that they were doing it for the sake of the laboring man; so that the poor working man, who had no other time, could go to the picture show on Sunday. Brother Bryan went to the laboring man in the steel mills, shops, and factories and made speeches — sometimes as many as thirty in one day. One day he attempted to show a group of working men what the politicians were trying to do. He called a worker to come up on the platform with him. Then he climbed up on his back, like a child rides on the back of his father, and rode that workingman around the platform.

"That's what the politicians are trying to do to you fellows. They're trying to ride you for their own purposes. Don't let the politicians ride you, boys!"

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The story of Brother Bryan riding the man down at the steel mill spread through all the mills and factories of the city. Men chuckled at the figure of the old minister riding the workman around the stage like a horse. It was better than any argument, and you would hear the comment, "Well, I guess the politicians won't ride me on election day."

The day before the voting arrived, Brother Bryan was at his telephone. He almost burned up the wires that day. "Is that you, my friend?" he would ask. "Can we count on you to support Jesus and the Christian Sabbath?" "You sure can, Brother Bryan," came many a reply. "Then let us pray," and a fervent brief prayer went up that God would confuse the forces of evil and bring victory to the right. All day and into the night, except when he must attend funerals or weddings, that telephone was busy.

The vote might not be counted correctly, so he asked a friend in each precinct to stay by the polling places until the vote was counted. The next day was the election, and still that telephone was busy. When the results began to come in, the precincts where the workers lived rolled up majorities against a wide-open Sunday. After all votes were tabulated, it was conclusive that Birmingham had lined up again for the Christian Sabbath. The old minister and the other Christians had won again for their convictions.

VI

ALL OF his life this minister has been a relentless foe of the liquor traffic. He calls the drink business "that heinous hyena of my forty-five years in Birmingham." When he arrived almost half a century ago the saloons were thick in "Jones' Valley." Within a block of his little church stood a great brewery, which, in order to keep up the taste for drink among the inhabitants, at times gave away free beer to all comers. Some sections of the city notorious for drunkenness and immorality were given significant names, "Hell's Half Acre," "Buzzard Roost," "Pigeon Roost,"

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and "Scratch Ankle." Some streets with the worst type of saloon were unsafe for women to walk, even by day.

The young minister began his work with saloons all around his little church. Frequently his bell would ring at night and some drunken woman was seeking a place to sleep that she might get off the street. His telephone would ring and a neighbor would be calling to say that Mr. A. was drunk and beating his wife. He visited in homes bare of any comfort, with furniture broken by drunken hands, and pinch-faced children huddling in some corner from a brute who had been drink-crazed the night before.

He loathed the traffic in drink. A righteous wrath burned against the saloon, the wrecker of men and homes. From the first day to this hour he has been the sworn enemy of strong drink. Nothing gives him greater pleasure than to point out in downtown Birmingham eleven skyscrapers standing where once eleven saloons had cursed the city. In any fight for temperance and sobriety he has taken a leading part, and today he is still on the job.

VII

THERE are two groups of men in the official life of Birmingham who feel that Brother Bryan especially belongs to them, the firemen and policemen. Should Brother Bryan be on his way to keep some appointment and have car trouble, it is only necessary for a telephone call to go to either the police or the fire headquarters, and the chief's own car, guided by some experienced policeman or fire-fighter, will go thundering out the door of the central station to get Brother Bryan to his appointment on the minute. Sometimes when his chauffeur fails him for the day, he calls the fire department and one of the stalwart firemen is detailed to drive his car. One of these men delights to tell of the time he went to be Brother Bryan's chauffeur and the minister worked him so hard, "going like a grocery truck making deliveries all day from 5 A.M. on," that he came back to the fire house that night completely exhausted and marveling how Brother Bryan had been able to wear him out.

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It is a long story of how Bryan won the hearts of the policemen and firemen of Birmingham. Back in the old days neither group of men could get off long enough from their duties to go to church, so Brother Bryan decided that the Gospel must be taken to them. The firemen were for much of their time stationed at the fire stations and had an opportunity to listen to anyone who could get their ear. The police were different, for most of their time they were out on their beats. Years ago Brother Bryan began his ministry to these men. He went to the police station, got acquainted with the men, let them know he was really their friend, and prayed and talked with them whenever possible. At the fire stations, by no means so numerous as the twenty-four which are now in Birmingham, he began regular Bible classes. It was not so easy at first. Some of the men did not care for a parson hanging around, and some had no faith in religion at all. Persistently, however, he kept on until gradually he had completely won both firemen and policemen.

He visited their sick. When some man was injured in the rapid rush to a fire or hurt as he fought the flames, or when some policeman was shot in the line of duty, sometimes Brother Bryan would actually beat the doctor to the hospital and the unconscious man would wake up to see the preacher standing over him. He won the bandmaster of the fire department by visiting the man's little nine-year-old girl as she lay wasting away with a disease for months. Day by day Brother Bryan called in that home until the whole household pinned their faith and hope to him. When there came death in the homes of the men, Brother Bryan was there with a word of comfort and a prayer to God. Sometimes as he taught a group of firemen, the gong would sound, the men would leap from their seats, spring to the wagons, and, as the fire apparatus rolled out of the station, the men would look back and see the preacher on his knees praying for them as they hastened to their dangerous tasks.

No wonder he won them! In the long ago when a man knelt at the fire station to pray, a shoe might come sailing across the room at the kneeling figure. Now all this has changed; Brother

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Bryan has for years been the best friend of both the police and firemen. They all say, "He never meets with us unless he prays for us." He calls them "his boys" and believes in them. "Men that are under control and have to obey rules like the military are more easily reached than any other group," is his opinion based upon experience.

His relation with the firemen is especially picturesque. Until all the fire stations were equipped with radios, he visited for prayer and Bible instructions the twenty-four stations once every two weeks. Now, since they can hear him by radio almost every day, he goes somewhat less often. The firemen started the subscription list for his first auto and when it was purchased sent one of their own number to instruct him how to run it. The man says that Brother Bryan was a difficult pupil for he expected the Ford to act with as much intelligence as his faithful horse. Driving an automobile was scarcely in his line, if he couldn't turn the wheel loose and ride as he did with the horse's reins dropped over the dashboard as he planned his ministry of service. Once each year the fire department sends a detailed squad down with their ladders to clean his church, and you may be sure they get all the cobwebs out. If he thinks some special music would liven up a church service, he can have the firemen's band anytime he wishes, and, if they cannot furnish enough harmony, the police band will be pleased to join them. When he got sick and went to the hospital in Mobile, "his boys," the firemen and policemen, wrote both individual letters and group letters from their stations. Sometime during the year he holds two memorial services: one for the firemen who have died, many of whom have died fighting the fires to protect the property of their fellow citizens, and one for the policemen who have passed away, some of them always having been killed as they bravely performed their duties. A few days after Christmas he always holds a reception around a Christmas tree at his church for the policemen, firemen, and their families. Two or three hundred of the police and an equal number from the fire department go to spend a short time with him in the church. They come in relays, the chief

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of each department letting the men off from duty long enough to get their families and go to Brother Bryan's church, shake his hand, and perhaps have a cup of tea with him.

Brother Bryan tells these men that he is the oldest fireman in Birmingham, "for I have been fighting hell fire longer than any of you." He has selected the fire truck "Big Pump No. 1" to be the hearse which will carry his body to its last resting place in the cemetery, and these boys of his, dreading terribly the arrival of that day, swear that this wish of their friend will be carried out.

VIII

THE EVENT of the year is the grand kidnapping stunt just before Christmas. For twenty-five years now the firemen have clothed Brother Bryan. They always do this at Christmas time. In each fire station they put up a list for subscriptions for Brother Bryan's Christmas present. Usually some three or four hundred dollars is given. When the money is all in hand, two men must be selected to handle the rest of the plot. Rivalry is so strong to be one of these two men that the chief ruled years ago that the selection must be by lot. Finally two men are chosen who get in touch with Mrs. Bryan as a fellow conspirator. The chief turns over his car to the lucky men, and they with a great flourish drive to his home, where Brother Bryan is boldly captured, placed in the Fire Chief's car by the side of Mrs. Bryan, and rushed to one of the leading clothing stores of the city.

The proprietor is usually warned that they are on the way, and either he himself, or one of the best clerks, is waiting the arrival of the firemen and their captive. They bring Brother Bryan in and get him a complete outfit — suit, hat, shoes, overcoat, shirts, socks, collars, ties, and everything a man can wear.

They have a lot of trouble getting him fitted. They say if it were not for their fellow conspirator, Mrs. Bryan, they would simply have to give him up as an impossibility. The first suit they try on him usually brings the remark: "Boys, it just fits fine," but then Mrs. Bryan gives it the lookover. Then the fire-fighters have a job on their hands, because immediately they

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find themselves the central attraction of the store. Business stops in other quarters, even at this busy pre-Christmas season, for it is an event to see the firemen outfit their captive clergyman. Between Bryan's greeting of friends and his protests, "That's too much to pay, my dear boys. Can't we get something cheaper? Think of the poor and unfortunate in this great city," they have a time finding just how he likes their purchases. His protests are useless and he is provided with the best. Finally, the men have satisfied themselves and Mrs. Bryan that everything is fitted, and, when no one can think of anything else he may need, the job is done.

Then invariably Brother Bryan prays. At a signal from the proprietor all business stops and clerks and customers gather around the elderly minister and "the boys" in blue. A few years ago one of the newspapers recorded his prayer on such an occasion.

"O God, to whom we come when we labor and are weary and heavy-burdened, look down upon these dear people and bless them as you have blessed me. Lead them to the foot of Thy throne that they may know the boundless love and tenderness of the Christ Child, who was born in a lowly manger two thousand years ago in the city of David. May their hearts sing the song of the Angels on the hills of Bethlehem as the hearts of the shepherds were uplifted to hear, 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and goodwill to men.' I thank Thee, God, for Thy bounty accorded to me in the name of Jesus our Saviour. O God, whose love is infinite for us poor, weak mortals, bless these my boys, who are so good to an old man, and bless this store and all the people in it, and God bless those who cannot buy as we are buying. God make their Christmas happy: for Jesus' sake. Amen."

There is a move forward as the prayer ceases. The others in the store wish to have some part in Brother Bryan's Christmas, but the firemen insist that it is their treat and that nothing more is needed, while Brother Bryan tells them, "Give it to God, brethren, and to His poor children."

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Then the stalwart figures in blue uniforms lead their captive and his wife out of the store, place him in the big fire car parked in front, and with the siren blowing, drive swiftly homeward. As they leave the couple at the door, they always place in Mrs. Bryan's hands the unspent part of the purse, usually some seventy-five dollars, for they know that their fellow conspirator is the only one of the two who can be really trusted with money.

IX

ON HIS sixty-seventh birthday, after forty-one years of service in the city, the City Commission of Birmingham appointed Dr. Bryan the official chaplain of the city, without salary; a position which for many years he had unofficially held. The letter read: "On this occasion of your birthday anniversary, the Commission of the City of Birmingham desires to recognize by a very slight token, your many years of faithful and unselfish service for the moral and material welfare of all the people of Birmingham, including the employees of all departments of the municipal government, as well as the prisoners in our jails. Accordingly at a recent conference of the Commission, it was decided to designate and appoint you as chaplain of the City of Birmingham as an expression of the high esteem, gratitude and love which the entire city feels for you and your noble work among us. Permit me, on behalf of the Commission and on behalf of the people of our great city, to congratulate you on your birthday and to wish you many more years of usefulness and blessing to our people."

Nothing could have pleased Brother Bryan more. All day long after he received that letter he was constantly pulling it out to show it to his friends. He took his City Chaplaincy most seriously. Each year he reports all of his civic ministry to the City Commission of Birmingham as carefully as if he were the highest paid officer of the city.

THE MINISTER CITIZEN

His report for the year closing August, 1931, began with this statement: "When God through you appointed me to be City Chaplain, I felt, first, that it was a call straight from God through this great city to me to be faithful to such a trust. I felt, secondly, that God through you gave to me an opportunity which He has given to but few men. I felt, thirdly, as I did when I first came here forty-two years ago, the great opportunity in a city, metropolitan in its nature, with men and women and children from all the ends of the earth. Along with the call, the opportunity, and the privilege came to me the responsibility that God, through you, had rolled over on me, that is, of making this city a holier place for men, women, and children to live. This, I have tried to do for forty-two years and two months."

CHAPTER TWELVE
HOLDING A CITY'S HEART

I

LONG YEARS ago the Master in Palestine announced: "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to hold the first place among you must be everybody's slave."

In a selfish age, given over to the amassing of fortunes, and in a city which during his ministry has grown from a village to an industrial giant and consequently has experienced the callous indifference and hardness which mark rapidly expanding industrialism, Brother Bryan has held aloft before men the heavenly gleam — "Not for self but for my fellow man."

Forty-five years ago Bryan stepped from the railroad car upon the little village platform of new Birmingham an unknown young man. There was not a single person to meet the new preacher. A handful of people had invited him to become the pastor of a very unpromising little church. The years have shown that this church could not have been in a more unlikely spot to develop into some great church with thousands of members. If almost half a century ago one had looked at the frail young man and his meager congregation, one would have consigned both long since to the limbo of forgotten things.

But Bryan had come to invest something which was unique in the new industrial city of the South — a heart of love and a life of service. His investment brought large dividends, for now for many years he has been holding the city's heart. Some years ago the president of the City Commission introduced him to a great audience in the following words: "No man in Birmingham is better known or better loved than Brother Bryan. There is one man in Birmingham about whom we are all agreed, and he is

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Brother Bryan." On another occasion the speaker introduced him to an audience of five thousand people gathered on the occasion of his thirty-eighth anniversary by saying: "For me to present Brother Bryan to a Birmingham audience is superfluous. He is the one man for whom we are all unanimous. I present to you the man who is better known and loved more than any man in the city." An editor of one of the city's daily newspapers commented: "Brother Bryan is the only man, whom we have ever known, whose motives have never been questioned." The spirit of the man whom Birmingham delights to honor is still very humble. On one of his anniversaries when more than five thousand people brought him a great ovation at the municipal auditorium, he rose and said, "Do not look at me, do not think of me. This great tribute which you pay is not due me, but must belong to Jesus Christ, who made me what I am."

He loved a great city — and love won.

II

A STORY out of the years gone by will show how this man, who kept his religion busy in the shoes of mercy, had love's grip upon a city's heart. It was back in the days before the automobile had taken the horse and buggy off the streets. Brother Bryan was then driving a pony hitched to a little cart, and both pony and cart were showing very distinct signs of wear. The "rattle-bang" cart and the jaded pony, with the busy minister, were familiar objects as they clattered down Main Street. One day a prominent attorney, a skilled man in his profession but at that time one who rarely entered a church building and was counted a wild character by his friends, saw the busy parson come down the street in his dilapidated outfit. "Say, fellows," said the lawyer, "Parson Bryan needs a new horse and buggy. That little old pony and wornout cart have seen their best days. I am not a church man, but I am starting a subscription list right now to get that preacher the best horse and buggy he ever saw."

Immediately the subscription list for the new horse and buggy was started with the lawyer's name heading the list. For the next few days he called upon his friends to hand over some cash for "Parson Bryan's" new horse and buggy. In a day or so he lacked only \$75.00. Each day at noon this lawyer took lunch with a number of intimate friends at the old Florence Hotel. The group was made up of two Jewish merchants, owners of large department stores, a prominent Baptist surgeon, and three lawyers, one Catholic, another reared in Presbyterian environment but at that time not a church member, and the third, our attorney B..... with no church affiliation.

"Well, B....., have you got your money for the preacher's rig?" the group called out as he joined them at lunch.

"No, but I am going to have it all before we finish lunch today," said the lawyer. "That parson needs a new horse and buggy and you fellows can just chip in and pay the balance. I only lack \$75.00."

"I tell you what we'll do," proposed one. "We know the parson needs his new horse and buggy. We will call a poker game tonight at A.....'s house. Parson Bryan will be the winner and we will chip out of each pot until you have your \$75.00." That evening there was held in Birmingham the only poker game at which Brother Bryan was ever the winner. Two Jews, a Catholic, a Baptist, a Presbyterian by birth, and a non-churchman, gambled with Brother Bryan as the keeper of the pot. While the parson held prayer meeting, the "Kitty" filled, until the purchase price was all in.

Then the next night with great glee that same group sent a man around to rob the preacher's stable. The following morning pony and cart were gone. As the afternoon papers were coming out describing the robbery committed at Brother Bryan's, a messenger called to say that the Judge of the Police Court had found a horse and buggy, which seemed to be Mr. Bryan's. When Brother Bryan went down to get back his little cart and pony, there stood a magnificent dappled gray horse, hitched in the best of harness to a shining buggy.

The judge made a little speech, about as follows: "A few unknown donors place in your hands this beautiful outfit to enable you better to keep pace with your loving thoughts in traveling from place to place, where mercy calls, where charity is needed, and sore distress craves your presence and your prayers."

Bryan called his new horse "Robert Extension." "Robert" was a familiar name and "Extension" was added, because with the new horse the minister's work could be greatly extended. He was the finest horse Brother Bryan ever owned, and for many years that "dappled gray" was one of Birmingham's well-known sights. The member of the "poker party" who furnished the information for this story says, "Some people said the horse got so he couldn't stop at anybody's house except poor folks."

"Robert Extension" passed to his reward many years ago, and his master never thought the less of his splendid horse for his connection with a "poker pot." If Brother Bryan reads this book, it will be the first time he has ever heard that he won "Robert Extension" as an absentee winner in a Birmingham poker game.

III

IT WOULD be impossible to tell all that J. A. Bryan has done for the people of greater Birmingham, and it would be almost as difficult to list the kindness that Birmingham's citizens have through the years bestowed on their best-loved fellow townsman.

They have furnished him with everything, and still he is as poor as when he began forty-five years ago. During these years he has cast his bread on many waters and it has been coming back to him in both affection and material things. His fellow citizens have given him clothes and food, buggies and automobiles, books and railroad journeys, checks and cash, but much of their giving has simply passed through his hands to others. Should you ask him today what he values most, he would surely say, "Their love and friendship."

The children love him, and this is the best gift of all. When the pastor's birthday comes around, the children have always had a part in the celebration, usually in some very original way.

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In Brother Bryan's church there has always been such informality that the children can at any time take part in the service. On his fifty-third birthday, as the church service came to a close, fifty-three tiny boys and girls came down the aisles as the organist played. The girls were led by a little lady, clad in white and carrying a bunch of white roses, and a young lad also dressed in white and carrying a bouquet of pink roses came down the other side aisle. Down the center aisle came a little boy holding on his arm a purple and white floral basket and took his place in front of the pulpit. Each child held a crisp one dollar bill, to which was attached a verse of Scripture, and, led by the leaders of each group with their floral tributes, they passed by the purple and white floral basket and dropped in their new dollar bills. Then they sang a hymn together. It was a love gift to their pastor.

On another birthday anniversary a little immigrant lad was standing outside the church as a woman with her liveried chauffeur drove up to the curb and stopped. "Lady, did you bring Brother Bryan any flowers? This is his birthday," said the lad from Italy.

"No, I did not know it was his birthday, and I did not bring flowers," she replied.

"Gee, I wish I had some money, I would give him flowers!" exclaimed the boy.

Opening her purse she placed a small coin in his hand. The boy hurried off to a florist shop and rushing in exclaimed, as he plunked down his coin, "This is Brother Bryan's birthday, and I want some flowers for him."

The florist knew Brother Bryan and arranged an expensive and beautiful armful of red tulips. Just as the service closed that morning this son of Italy marched down the aisle, right up to the pulpit, his arms full of red tulips, and deposited his tribute at his friend's feet.

IV

EARLY in the year 1920, the *Birmingham News* announced that the paper would present each year a loving cup to the value of \$500 to that citizen of Birmingham who had rendered the greatest

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service to the city during the year. The first award was for 1920 and the cup would be presented to this distinguished citizen in January, 1921. During the year news articles appeared from time to time telling of the kind of work worthy of such high honor. Suggestions were made that good deeds to children, promotion of public welfare or health, the initiation of movements for betterment of citizenship, municipal improvements, or benefactions to the community might be considered of sufficient value to merit the award of the loving cup, but there were to be no strings or limitations to its award.

Early in December the *News* made known the manner in which the selection would be made. A committee of seven, representing the civic clubs, the city commission, and the Chamber of Commerce were appointed to make the final decision, but to assist them in getting the opinion of the city the columns of the newspaper were to be opened for any citizen to make a nomination and all letters of nomination were to be printed. As outlined in the original announcement, "Service is the keynote of the day, and the noblest form of service lies in unselfish devotion to the welfare of one's city and fellows. What individual has done most during the year 1920 to enrich and ennoble the lives of the citizens of Birmingham? That will be the question for the board to decide."

Immediately the public interest was aroused.

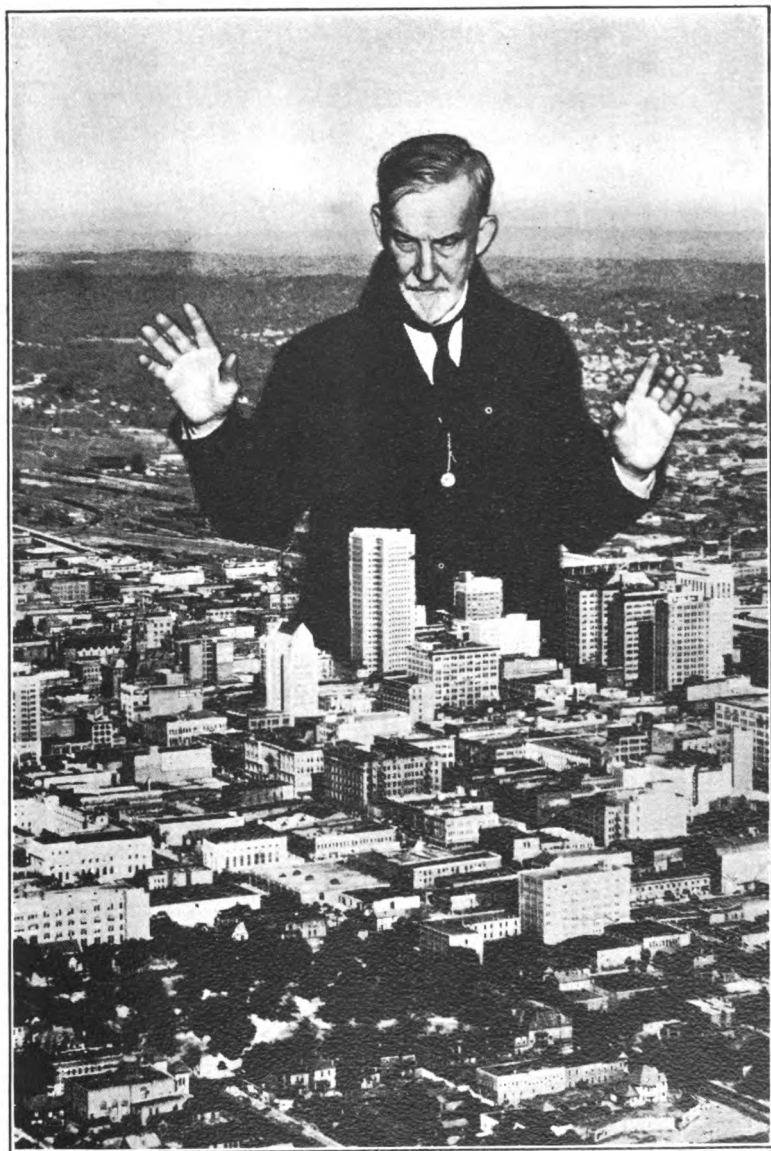
The first nominations were Mr. Henry De Bardeleben, for his work in developing the Warrior River traffic and bringing seacoast rates to Birmingham's shipping interest; Police Sergeant W. W. Brent, for heroic service in preventing a race riot in the summer; Assistant Fire Chief J. L. Akin for turning the fire hose upon the angry mob of excited men and dispersing it; Mr. James Weatherly for his service in connection with the Rainbow Viaduct over the railroad yards — the city's pride in construction for the year; and Mr. Ed. H. Andrews for his splendid work for boys in scouting and the boys' clubs of the city. Then Dr. J. A. Bryan was nominated by three citizens on the same day. In all fifty-three names were finally placed in nomination for the award.

From the first it was evident that one nomination had caught the city's imagination. Brother Bryan was the man for the first loving cup award. Letters deluged the newspaper office nominating and urging the selection of the preacher at the little Third Presbyterian Church. It looked like everybody wanted to write a letter for this pastor. Letters kept coming from rich and poor and men of every race and faith. Before long the paper was getting letters signed with long lists of names, the Birmingham Typographical Union, with fifty-three names, employees of Sloss City Furnace with fifty-seven names, the city Police Department with fifty names, a petition signed with two hundred and forty names, men of the Southern Railway shops with two hundred names; and still more letters from individuals and groups poured in.

One of the most beautiful letters was sent by Mr. Robert N. Simpson, who had been nominated for the same honor. He wrote: "One could not have experienced greater surprise than I when I read my name in the list of nominations yesterday for the *News'* loving cup, for my ministry in the community has not merited in the least such recognition, even by the generous young friend who has placed a higher evaluation on simple ministries than they have deserved, but whose gracious tribute and the friendship prompting it I appreciate. My residence here has been too brief, and my acquaintance too limited, to give me confidence to nominate one for such signal honor. I am confident, however, that the Road of the Loving Heart should lead to the Shrine of the Loving Cup, and many travel that road to the glory of our great community; but I believe, with a host of my fellow citizens, whose sentiment has found published expression, that the foremost pilgrim of that road in our community is Dr. J. A. Bryan."

V

ON JANUARY 9, 1921, the *Birmingham News* came out with a headline stretching across the front page of the paper, "Rev. J. A. Bryan is awarded the *News'* Loving Cup." It was the unanimous



Courtesy Birmingham Post

A PREACHER IN A CITY'S LIFE

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decision of the seven judges that Brother Bryan was the citizen who had done most to enrich and ennoble the lives of his fellow citizens. Never did a decision of judges meet with more enthusiastic response on the part of the public, for everyone knew that the right choice had been made.

The presentation followed two weeks later on a Sunday afternoon. This was probably the most remarkable day in the life of the city, for the heart of a great industrial city was moved by love toward one man. One of the largest theaters was offered for the presentation ceremonies. Two hours before the doors opened the sidewalk in front of the theater was crowded with people, who had come early so that they would be sure to get in. Hundreds were turned away, after every seat was taken to the top gallery.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten service. The chairman of the occasion, Mr. Nesbit, introduced the publisher of the *Birmingham News*, Mr. Victor Hanson, who explained the purpose of the loving cup and extended the congratulations of the *News* to the winner of its cup. Then followed addresses of appreciation from the clergy of the city, represented by the Episcopal rector of the Church of Advent, Dr. Bornwell; the pastor of the Independent Presbyterian Church, Dr. Edmonds; the pastor of the First Methodist Church, Dr. George Stuart; and the Rabbi of Temple Emanuel, Dr. Morris Newfield.

In his address Rabbi Newfield said:

"I have known Dr. Bryan longer perhaps than any of the speakers. I knew him here twenty-five years ago and he has not changed. He is still the same Brother Bryan. His choice for this honor is the most popular; it could have been no other..... To show how unanimous this choice has been, there was not a dissenting voice at a gathering at my home not long ago when the loving cup was discussed. All agreed that Brother Bryan should get it. He is the most beloved man in our city and his motto is 'Love thy neighbor.'

"Christianity, through Brother Bryan, is a religion without limitations, and I have never seen a man who caught the message of Jesus and illustrated it so tenderly and gently and splendidly as Brother

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Bryan, for, deeply spiritual, he has caught that message and, following Jesus, is going about doing good. . . . He is the noblest, sweetest spirit I have ever known."

Next the chairman called on a representative of labor, "among whom Brother Bryan has worked often and late." He spoke of Brother Bryan as a laborer's brother. "All working men know Brother Bryan. He labors with them and they will work their hands off for him."

His own Third Church was represented on the program by an elder, Dr. Hopping, who spoke of their love for their pastor and the appreciation of the church in the bestowal of this unique honor upon her minister. The chairman rose to award the cup. "Dr. Bryan stands at the source of the River of Kindness that flows throughout the world, making fertile places for Christian lives," he said as he concluded. Then he reached forward and took the beautiful cup from its pedestal, and the great audience burst into applause as he placed it in Brother Bryan's hands.

VI

THIS was Brother Bryan's response:

"God has a plan for every person's life. He planned my poor, unworthy life. Thirty-one years, seven months, twenty-three days ago this morning, at 6:00 o'clock, He ordered my ways and directed my steps to this city — then a baby.

"He moved the heart of my friend, Victor Hanson, to give this cup as a reward of service. This was God's plan and, we trust, for God's glory. The giving of this cup is in God's plan for my life, to cheer me; to encourage me; to help me along the way. We desire to thank all of these dear friends from the depths of our hearts for the tender, kind, loving, cheering words which have come from their hearts and their lips to our heart this afternoon.

"When McCall, the Episcopal clergyman, went from England to Paris to begin his work in that French city, he stood on the streets of Paris and said to the passing multitudes: 'God loves you and I love you.' I felt that way when I first came to this city, and I certainly feel that way this afternoon. I repeat with all the emphasis of my heart

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and life, I love you with all my heart and with all my strength. I love you because you first loved me. There isn't any love without expression.

"When I came to this city to begin my humble work, you put your arms about me; you folded me to your heart; you began to love me; your love has never changed. When I needed help, you helped me and when I was sick, you visited me. You took us in your hospitals; you cared for our tired bodies. When we needed coal, you sent it to us; and clothes, you gave them to us. Money to build churches, you gave to us. When we needed to ride, you gave us a horse and automobiles. When I wanted to study, you wanted to send me away and gave me the money. The only money I have is the \$100.00 to take a trip on, and you gave it to me. I love you so well I cannot leave you.

"I speak, feeling my responsibility to God and to every man, woman, and child in this great city that I love better than my life! These days are strange to me. I do not ask God why.

"You have presented me with the cup. You have not given it to me. I will not accept this as a gift to myself. It is our cup! I fold it to my heart. I fold you to my heart. I give you my heart and rededicate myself to yourselves.

"First, I do not accept this cup as a reward for service. I accept it as a trust from God and from you. It is a sacred trust; it is a holy trust. I do not speak of it lightly; I do not deal with it lightly. It is a trust from God to me. You have trusted me with it. Can God trust me with it? It is a charge for me to keep.

*"O God, help me to watch and pray,
And on Thyself rely,
Assured, if I my trust betray,
I shall forever die.*

I rely on God and on you to keep this trust. O God, help me to be faithful to this trust; help me to be faithful to the friends who gave it!

"Second, this is not an hour when we are rewarded. I am not called to get a reward for service. I have not served as I should. This is an hour when God calls me to a higher service; it is an hour of dedication in my tired life. My whole life has been filled with roses! Every day since I came to Birmingham, there have been flowers in my pathway. God calls me to do bigger things and humbler things.

I love you all, but I love the thousands that could not get in this building just as well. That fact is a call to Birmingham to build a larger building and dedicate its best to provide an auditorium where people can go and worship God by the thousands.

"In the diary of David Livingstone, the great missionary to Africa, was found these words written sometime before his death:

"Jesus, my Lord, my King, my God, I again rededicate my life and my service to Thee, and to the furtherance of Thy Kingdom."

"Looking at this cup, God looking upon me, in your hearing, depending on your prayers and God's help, I write the same vow of rededication — 'Jesus, my Lord, my King, my God, I again rededicate my life, my all, to the upbuilding of Birmingham; to the helping of humanity, and to the glory of God!'"

"The night before General J. E. B. Stuart was mortally wounded, he said to one of his aides as they stood around the campfire, 'I don't know whether I believe in dreams or not, and I am not sure what a presentiment is, but last night I had a strange presentiment. It was this, the next engagement we go into — the next fight we have with the enemy, I am to fall. If I do, I want you to write to my home and write to my friends and tell them that I have given to my country the best that I possess.'

"We don't know what's in the future. I do not know. Oh, my friends, I appeal to you from the depths of a grateful heart, from the depths of a humble heart, from the depths of an unworthy heart; I beg you, if I die the next visit I make, if I get killed in an automobile, I beg you newspaper men to write these few lines — that I have given to Birmingham the best that God has given to me in body, in brain, in heart, in life. Tell the poor brokenhearted women in yonder lonely room, tell the sick and the distressed, tell the men in the shops, in the counting room in the bank, in the hospital — that I have given to Birmingham the very best that I possess, the best that God has to me given."

VII

THEN on the inspiration of the moment, the chairman announced that Dr. Edmonds would hold the loving cup at the door for a donation of money for Mrs. Bryan. After the benediction the great crowd started for the doors where stood the minister holding

the loving cup. The money rained in quarters, dollars, dimes, nickels, greenbacks, tens and fives and ones. The big cup holding eight quarts was soon full, some \$231.00. The manager of the theater brought out a large money sack and pouring the money in he handed it to one of the sons of Brother Bryan saying, "This money is not for your dad, he'd give it away. Take it home to your mother."

But the most affecting scene was when Brother Bryan finally emerged from the crowded auditorium to the street and was met by the crowd who had been unable to get in. They rushed to greet him. They grasped his hands and some kissed him. Tears filled many eyes. How they loved him, these his fellow citizens, old and young, rich and poor!

The next day at the Ministerial Association it was laughingly suggested that the ministers of the city had best pass a resolution forbidding Brother Bryan to pawn his new cup, for it was feared that the first time he found someone in need and had no money, the loving cup would land in a pawnshop.

VIII

THE NEXT YEAR, 1922, the unusual nervous energy which through the years had made possible his tireless service in Birmingham temporarily collapsed. His body was giving warning that the pace he had set for years could not be always maintained. It was with difficulty that his family and friends forced him to stop, and then there came long weeks of enforced rest and hospital treatment. It was the first time that he had left his work for any length of time since he landed in Birmingham as a boy preacher. He had always boasted that he never took a vacation, for he urged that since the devil never took time off, someone had to stay on the job to fight him.

The strain had been too severe and now his body and nerves must pay the price. It was difficult for him to be quiet in Birmingham, where he felt so keenly the need round about him. He was taken to a hospital in Mobile, Alabama, for three months.

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There down by the sea he regained his health, as he says, "through the prayers of many friends." His confident faith in God sustained him during those days. In a sermon sometime after his recovery he told of his experience thus: "When I was in the hospital in Mobile and only the nurse with the doctor permitted in the room with me, at evening from my window I could look out and see the sea gulls perched on some of the houses near the hospital. Realizing the financial strain that was hanging over myself and family, but considering my spiritual needs more, I thought of Jesus' words in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew 'Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not of much more value than they?' As I would look upon the beautiful flowers which my friends sent me I thought of His words: 'Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Take no thought of such things, for after these things do the Gentiles seek.'"

Birmingham was solicitous about her beloved pastor. Regularly news items telling of his condition appeared in the paper. His ministry during these three months was greatly missed, and his room in the hospital at Mobile was flooded with flowers, letters, and messages. Brother Bryan did not forget these friends. From his sickroom he attempted to write letters. Below is a letter to his own congregation:

July 9, 1922

TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

DEAR FRIENDS:

My heart's desire and prayer for you is that you may be greatly blessed today. It has been my privilege to labor with you for over thirty-three years. You have been a great help and inspiration to me. I love you all. You can help me by your prayers. You can encourage

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me and your church officers by your presence at all the services, and by your faithfulness to Jesus Christ. I pray for you without ceasing.

May the peace of God which passeth understanding keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. I thank God for sending you the two dear brethren to minister to you today. Pray without ceasing.

Yours in Christ,

J. A. BRYAN.

Then one day in October the papers carried the good news. "Brother Bryan has recovered. He will be returning to Birmingham tomorrow." It was good news to the city and a widely quoted editorial appeared the next day, commenting on what this meant to Birmingham.

"Probably more than a hundred thousand citizens of Birmingham read with joy the announcement in Tuesday's *News* that Brother Bryan has passed through the valley of the shadow of death and shortly will go to the North Carolina mountains for recuperation. For many weeks this good man's life was despaired of by his physicians and friends. For a time it was feared that his Master had need of him in some brighter land where human suffering is unknown, and where hunger and thirst do not exist, and where wretchedness and poverty are unknown.

"But constantly through all that terrific struggle Brother Bryan had with death, Birmingham friends wrestled with God in prayer for him. All that could be done by medical science to keep the spirit in its earthly habitation has been done. And it has come to pass that this loving vigil and teamwork of strong hearts, bent upon his recovery for larger service in Christ's name, have brought him back from the threshold of the Larger Life.

"Pretty soon, God willing, he will be the same old earnest, loving, compassionate Bryan passing through the byways and hedges of Greater Birmingham looking for the helpless and the afflicted, the scorned, the broken, blessing them, giving the cup of water, the loaf of bread, and whatever money he may have in his purse.

"Brother Bryan is coming back. That was the big news of Tuesday."

And he did come back. He has stayed harder at work than ever, performing the type of ministry that few men are capable of doing. He does not go far from the city any more, but preaches only in those places that are near Birmingham. His preaching is with a continued zeal that cannot be equaled by many younger men.

IX

IT WAS the anniversary of the awarding of the *Birmingham News* Loving Cup to the most useful citizen of the city. The first winner of this cup must certainly be present on the occasion to make the opening prayer. Several thousand people would be gathered in the auditorium that Sunday afternoon and the meeting would not be complete unless Brother Bryan was present.

At the last minute he called by telephone to say that it would be impossible for him to be present for the opening prayer, since that afternoon there was an important funeral which could not be delayed. He thought, however, that it would be possible for him to return in time to offer a prayer at the end of the meeting.

The hour came for the awarding of the loving cup and the city auditorium was filled with a large audience. "Where is Brother Bryan?" many asked. "We thought he was to open the meeting with prayer."

At that hour he was in a distant part of the city bringing the last religious rites to the body of a poor fallen woman, whom by God's grace he had led in her last illness to the Saviour. On her deathbed he had promised to see her decently buried, and now he was there to say the last words, while yonder the great crowd gathered in the auditorium. The room was almost empty, the preacher, the man who drove the preacher's car, the hired undertaker, a few women from the neighborhood, and several men were the only ones present. The driver of his car says that the prayer was the most beautiful Brother Bryan ever prayed.

The service was over. It was time to move the casket. Several men stepped forward. The preacher waved them back, and, look-

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ing them steadily in the eye, he said: "You men were responsible for her fall. I know you. I will pray for you. I hope God will save you and forgive your sins, but you can't touch her now. She is saved, redeemed by Jesus Christ. Her corpse will not be polluted by your touch." With conscience-stricken faces the men stepped back, while minister, undertaker, and chauffeur lifted the casket into the hearse, and the "redeemed harlot" was carried to her grave and placed in it by Brother Bryan and his two helpers. Over the lonely grave he pronounced the benediction of Almighty God.

Then quickly he stepped into his car and sped swiftly through the city. The loving cup had been awarded, the year's benefactor of the city was standing with it in his hands, the audience was upon their feet, when a stoop-shouldered, white-haired old man slipped upon the platform. A thousand loving eyes were turned upon him. He had come to close the great gathering with a prayer.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
THE LAND HIS MASTER TROD

I

AFTER his enforced absence from Birmingham because of illness in the year 1922, Brother Bryan became more and more unwilling to leave the city of his love. Again in 1927 his incessant toil and the strain of many enterprises began to tell upon him. For five years now he had left the city only for the briefest periods: no longer was he getting that change of environment and labor which formerly came to him, when he had taken part in evangelistic missions in other sections of the country.

With the intuition of a wise wife, Mrs. Bryan realized that it would be necessary for him to take a vacation, if he would escape another physical breakdown. The officers of his church had also noticed the strain under which he was laboring and had insisted upon his taking a long-needed rest, but had been unable to force a vacation upon their pastor.

One day Mrs. Bryan read in the newspaper of a church granting their pastor a leave of absence to study in Palestine, and the thought came to her that perhaps by a well-managed strategy on the part of the family and his church, he might be induced to attempt such a trip. She knew that it had long been a cherished dream that sometime he might see the land his Master trod. If anything could draw him away from Birmingham, it would be the country of his Bible. Mrs. Bryan consulted with a few of the officers of the church and they entered wholeheartedly into the plan. A little group of friends began to talk and plan of how to get Brother Bryan off to the Holy Land.

Then before the little group at the Third Church scarcely knew what had happened, the proposed trip for Brother Bryan

got beyond the control of his little church and became a city-wide enterprise.

Mr. Earle C. Lackey, his ardent admirer, wrote the following letter on Saturday, May 14, 1927, to the *Birmingham News*:

"Editor *The Birmingham News*: In June Brother James A. Bryan will close 38 years of his faithful service for the people of Birmingham. It seems to me it would be most fitting for our citizens to give him and his good wife a trip to the Holy Land as an expression of our appreciation for his untiring ministry among us through these many years. I am sure there are hundreds of people who would be delighted to be included in the list of contributors, who would like to honor Brother Bryan on his anniversary."

On that very day Birmingham's smallest man, Uncle Billy Whitefield, the "Midget Cart Driver," got wind of what was going on. For nineteen years he had been a member of Brother Bryan's church. He was less than three feet in stature and hobbled around on a little crutch. For years he with a diminutive little pony and cart had delivered shoes around the city for the Blue Ribbon Shoe Shop. The good nature of "Uncle Billy" and the tenderness of his heart were not measured by the size of his body, and when he heard of the plans to send his beloved pastor to Palestine, he determined to be the first contributor to this fund. He immediately sent \$25.00, designed for his saving account, to the *News* as a starter for the Brother Bryan Fund.

Next day the Sunday morning issue of the *News* appeared with Mr. Lackey's letter proposing a trip to the Holy Land for Brother Bryan, with a picture of the clergyman and his diminutive friend, William A. Whitefield, and with a statement that the management of the paper would add \$100.00 to "Uncle Billy's" \$25.00 and that the *Birmingham News* would act as a clearing house for the Brother Bryan Fund. So on Sunday, May 15, the movement started.

On Tuesday an article endorsing the movement to send Brother Bryan to the Holy Land ended as follows:

"If Brother Bryan wants to go to the Holy Land, let's send him. But for safety's sake let's send a couple of strong guards along with

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him, because, if we don't, before he gets to Anniston he'll have given away all his money and extra clothes and have started walking back to Birmingham in time to quote Scripture to some hobo in the county jail.

"Seriously, though, let's send him — and send him in all the comfort and ease that he deserves."

II

IT WOULD be necessary to have at least \$3,000.00 for the proposed trip, since it was necessary for Mrs. Bryan or someone to go with him. No one thought of letting him make the long journey alone. For the first few days the money came in rather slowly. People did not believe that Brother Bryan could be gotten away from Birmingham, and at first he insisted that nothing could induce him to leave the city for as long as three months. He balked — he simply would not go. "What's the use of subscribing to the fund?" folks asked. "Brother Bryan won't go." By Friday, May 20, the Fund had climbed to \$733.75. Still they were having trouble prying Brother Bryan away from Birmingham, but he was gradually weakening. His friends were telling him how much it would mean to the city for him to go and come back with stories of the Holy Land and tell of the country where Jesus had lived to the thousands who would never be able to make the journey. At last for the sake of Birmingham, he consented. He would go for the help which he might be able to bring to others. A reporter got this brief statement from him: "I've thought about it and prayed about it, and I've come to the conclusion that I ought to go, though it will be tearing my heart out to leave Birmingham."

When the statement that he would go appeared in the paper, money began to pour in for the Brother Bryan Fund, and within ten days \$3,764.00 had been received and the Editors began to cry "Enough," but the money kept on coming.

On June 4th, Mr. Charles A. Fell, managing editor of the *Birmingham News*, wrote Dr. Bryan the following letter:

REV. J. A. BRYAN, *Pastor*,
Third Presbyterian Church, City.

June 4, 1927.

MY DEAR BROTHER BRYAN:

We are happy to tell you, at the end of your thirty-eighth year of loving service to the people of Birmingham, that these same people among whom you have labored so faithfully and so kindly and so effectively have determined to give you the vacation you so richly deserve. You have, no doubt, followed from day to day the accounts in *The Birmingham News* of the progress of the movement to get together a fund to defray the expenses of a trip to the Holy Land for you and Mrs. Bryan. It would do your heart good to see all the letters that have come to us with the subscriptions to this fund, ranging all the way from 25 cents up to something more than \$228.00. They express a warmth of love and a depth of gratitude to you, the like of which the executives of this newspaper have never seen. They constitute, in our opinion, a fitting recognition of the splendid part you have played in the life of this community, and we believe they could give you nothing you would appreciate more than such a testimonial of their sincere regard.

The contributions to the fund now are being audited to determine the exact amount subscribed. Within a few days this checking will be completed. It will show something more than \$4,000 in the total. This fund will be placed in the hands of a committee of your friends composed of Mr. Henry R. Howze, Mr. Crawford Johnson, and Mrs. Jere C. King, who have expressed a pleasure in serving with you and Mrs. Bryan in arranging details of the trip to the Holy Land. This committee will get in touch with you in a few days with a view of relieving you of the many troublesome phases of matters incident to a trip abroad.

We of *The Birmingham News* desire to add our expression of love on this occasion. We feel that we are very greatly indebted to Mr. Earle C. Lackey, for suggesting that we sponsor the fund. By so doing he made for us the opportunity to do a fine thing — a thing we have enjoyed doing tremendously.

It is our great hope that you and Mrs. Bryan will enjoy your journey abroad to the utmost and that both of you will return to us much refreshed and otherwise benefitted by the trip. Meanwhile, may God's richest blessing be yours.

Sincerely yours,

CHARLES A. FELL, *The Birmingham News*.

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In a characteristic reply Brother Bryan sent a letter of acceptance to the *Birmingham News*, from which several paragraphs are extracted.

"Each of us in looking back over our lives, thinking and praying that we can find God's hand, can say, 'God has ordered our steps.' When a student in the Theological Seminary I thought of this and prayed that, unworthy as I was, God would direct my steps only to glorify Him.

"Amid discouragements and amid adversities, I have never doubted that God called me to Birmingham to serve Him, even though sometimes in a misunderstood way. I would be a traitor to Christ and ungrateful to God, if I did not pause at this another milepost in my life and give God thanks, and this city thanks, and my friends thanks, for all they have meant to me. . . .

"I write this with a heart filled with gratitude. No pastor has ever had a happier, a more patient, and a more prayerful pastorate than mine. No man has ever had his lot cast in a city with so many kind people, who have proved their faith by their unselfish works for Jesus Christ. I love the city and everybody in it. Naturally I would, as the city has proved that it loves me.

"I cannot close without thanking *The Birmingham News* for collecting the offering to send me on this journey, that I might return better equipped to do the work which God has given me to do. Jesus, my Lord, I again rededicate my life in the stillness of this evening and this hour to Thee."

III

BROTHER BRYAN was going to the Holy Land! His boat sailed from New York within three weeks. He was going as the guest of Birmingham, and the city was interested in every step of preparation.

Mrs. Bryan decided that for reasons of health she had best not attempt the trip. Harry Bryan, the youngest son, was a theological student at Columbia Theological Seminary and it seemed the logical thing for the young preacher to accompany his father on this journey to the land of the Bible. A committee

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of three was appointed to arrange all the details of the trip for him, for, as soon as he realized that his dream of a trip to Palestine would soon be a reality, Brother Bryan became so busy expressing his appreciation to the many who had made it all possible, searching his Bible for the places he would soon be seeing, and making talks on all occasions upon the subject, "What I expect to see," that, if left to him, the arrangements would never have been made.

The best trip available for Palestine seemed to the committee to be offered by the Wicker Tours, and then, that his vacation might be a little longer, they added a trip to the British Isles and a short stay on the continent.

Sunday, June 19, was a red-letter day at the little Third Presbyterian Church and in the life of her pastor. The auditorium could not hold the crowds which gathered there for both the morning and evening services. Dr. Bryan talked about his trip and the things he expected to see. He gave a brief sketch of some of the places made sacred by the presence of Christ as He had walked in Palestine years ago. The pastor was happy, gloriously happy — except for the fact that he was leaving Birmingham on the morrow.

Monday was a busy day. There were the last calls to be made on the sick, scores to call by telephone, and then the reporters wanted a last word from him. Finally he arrived with all his family at the station fifteen minutes before the train was scheduled to depart. A great crowd filled the station. They had come to see Brother Bryan off. The Police Band had come in force and they were interspersing sacred numbers with patriotic airs. Then the train came in. Brother Bryan held up his hands for silence, spoke a few words, asked the crowds to join in singing a hymn, and then led them all in praying together, out under the train shed, the Lord's Prayer.

He got on the train and came out on the rear platform and called, "God bless you, every one of you. I love you all." And hundreds shouted back, "Take care of yourself" and "God be with you till we meet again."

The train pulled out, and the old man stood there on the back platform waving his handkerchief until the son led him into the train. Thus amid joy and tears and prayers of the people who loved him, the man who had given thirty-eight years of unstinted service to Birmingham was on the first lap of his journey to the land his Saviour trod.

The first stop was Spartanburg, South Carolina, to visit his mother's grave. He was met here at the station by a florist delivery car bringing a beautiful wreath of roses, which a thoughtful friend had provided as a tribute to his mother. On the way to New York the father and son stopped at Washington to visit Arlington Cemetery and the grave of Woodrow Wilson at the Cathedral.

Soon they reached New York and found themselves aboard the *S. S. Transylvania* bound for Glasgow and at the end — Palestine. In his stateroom were stacks of letters and telegrams, books to read, and a beautiful vase of rosebuds, sent by the men of the Typographical Union, which would come to full bloom when they had been at sea two days. With tears streaming down his face the old minister knelt and thanked God for the love of his many friends.

IV

ON THE way over Brother Bryan spent much time studying his Bible and getting ready for his pilgrimage through the Holy Land. He must be familiar with all the places, for his trip was not for himself but for the thousands at home to whom he would bring messages. He says that on the journey over he looked up all the passages in the Bible about storms, and watched the sea gulls as he thought of the Lord's saying "Behold the fowls of the air..."

He would discuss for long periods the things which he hoped to see in the Bible lands. He was always "pumping" someone for some new light upon his one Book. When he came back to the stateroom, he would tell Harry, "They helped me so much."

When he arrived in Europe he was by no means the usual tourist. He was restless in the capitals, anxious to get on to

Palestine, for, when that was finished, he could get home to Birmingham. He was chiefly interested in the places of religious interest. One of his great days in Scotland was at Blantyre, the town of David Livingstone. Here the humble village workmen reminded him of his own hard-working poor in Birmingham and he stopped them on the streets, as if he were at home, to have prayer with them. Another day was spent in Ayrshire, visiting amid the scenes of Burns, and his son Harry says that, since a Scottish friend was along who carefully told only the great Bobby's "good points," his father enjoyed it very much. Edinburgh, with her Presbyterian background, proved a place of real interest. He enjoyed a walk in the evening down picturesque Princess Street and thrilled at the sight of the beautiful flowers across the way under the shadow of the ancient castle. Each evening as father and son came back to the hotel room, there was always a prayer for the good people "who had provided such a comfortable place."

Father and son journeyed together down through England, visiting a few places of interest on the way. At Oxford and Cambridge it was the things relative to the spiritual life of the students past and present that held his interest. The old Bible manuscripts in the libraries attracted his attention. Churchmen like Ridley and Cranmer became living figures for him amid the surroundings in which they had lived and suffered. In the museums, art galleries, and historical buildings he would be interested in many things, but his attention was always held by that which had a religious significance. As he journeyed he clearly showed where lay the chief passion of his heart.

In Holland he made a side trip to visit a family at Wassaner. The wife, a Jewess, had at one time lived in Birmingham and done settlement work. He could not bear to pass through Holland and fail to visit this woman who had once worked for the needy in his own Birmingham.

France and Switzerland did not greatly interest him. Geneva held his attention because of Calvin and its connection with the League of Nations. This caused him to say, "Geneva is really

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one of the best places we have seen so far." He was interested in people, and the barrier of the foreign language worried him no little. In Switzerland after a long train journey, father and son were passing the engineer's cab on their way to the station. He could resist it no longer and, in spite of the foreign tongue, he stopped beside the cab window and prayed with the engineer. He simply wished to express his gratitude to the engineer for helping him along the way, and he always did it in Birmingham.

When he reached Rome, his enthusiasm quickened, for there his Bible took up the story. It was the Mamertine prison, the little dug-out chapels in the catacombs, and the Appian Way which thrilled his soul. Neither St. Peter's, nor the stately buildings of modern Rome, nor any ancient ruin of Roman grandeur could draw his thoughts from the early Christians, their struggles and martyrdom in the New Testament days.

At Naples they joined the Wicker cruise party. The first stop in the Mediterranean was Athens. There were two things he wanted to see in Athens — Mars Hill for Paul's sake, and the mother of one of his Greek restaurant friends in Birmingham. He went with the party upon Mars Hill, where a brief service was held, and then, while the other members of the cruise spent the afternoon sightseeing, he and Harry hired a rather expensive taxicab to drive out to a refugee camp to find the mother of his Birmingham restaurant friend. It was a chance he had to repay the many kindnesses of that Greek back in Birmingham. Finally they located the mother, placed the letter from her son in her hands, and immediately Brother Bryan prayed. When he finished his prayer, they learned that the friend from Birmingham had taken a more direct route and arrived in Athens ahead of them and was that afternoon looking for Brother Bryan in the city. The next morning at sunrise the young Greek came down to the ship to see Brother Bryan off from Athens. He was overflowing with appreciation and Brother Bryan felt amply rewarded.

When he reached Constantinople, it was deeply impressed upon the soul of Brother Bryan that the Christian faith no longer predominated here and that he was in the land of

Mohammed. The muezzin's call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque was to him also a call to stop wherever he was and pray that the people of the land might be confronted with his living Christ. The missionary work in the lands by which he passed interested him tremendously, for they were giving Christ to a needy world. The colleges of the Near East, built and operated through American benevolence, were a never-tiring topic of conversation, and it was his constant prayer and hope that God would enable them to give Christ to the youth of the Near East. The voyage was a constant delight, refreshing to him both in body and spirit. Then at last they reached the goal — Palestine.

V

THEY landed at Beirut. From this port, the party was to cross the Lebanon by way of the ruins of Baalbek, down through Damascus and into Galilee. Since there was a large group in the Wicker Tour, it took quite a caravan of motor cars. The Arab chauffeurs, true to their proverbial reputation, drove like the wind. Brother Bryan was given a front seat at the side of the driver and kept his Bible open all the way. When the car rounded some curves and an exclamation was heard from Harry or others from the back seat that the car was still "right side up," Brother Bryan was not in the least perturbed, for his mind was too occupied with the land and the Book to be disturbed by anything. He had many questions, and the guides and drivers, fascinated by the unique earnestness of the old man, were most solicitous to help him all they could. Hearing his son call him "Father," they soon adopted the title and to the group Brother Bryan was "Father" for the days in Palestine.

At Damascus he began to live again the Bible story. Paul had walked along those streets, and from Damascus the kings of Syria had planned their campaign against Israel. Every traditional spot was to him a sacred place. While the usual tourist holds a "Baedeker" constantly in his hand, Brother Bryan held his Bible, for this was the guidebook to those things he was most anxious to see.

One day they had gone to the street called "Straight" to see the house where Ananias found the blinded Paul. A guide had pointed out to them the things usually shown to tourists. Before long Brother Bryan left the crowd and climbed up in the automobile to read again the Bible passage and meditate upon the experience of Paul. The rest of the party were still inside. Hearing a great commotion outside, Harry rushed out to discover what it was all about and found his father in a group of excited Damascenes and chauffeurs with his hands uplifted in prayer. It had happened that while Brother Bryan was meditating quietly in the car, the Arab drivers and the loafers of Damascus suddenly became involved in a not unusual street quarrel. As the blows began to fall, the elderly minister climbed down quickly from his seat, stepped into the middle of the excited group, and lifting his hands with quiet composure began to pray. Whether they understood his language or not, this act brought results, for instantly the fight stopped. His praying even in this land of a strange language had in it something compelling.

Harry and his father made a special trip from Damascus to the traditional spot where around the persecuting Saul with his letters to Damascus there had shone the bright light. Harry wished his father to have all the time he wished at the spot where "Saul" became "Paul," and, as Brother Bryan lingered there and prayed, it was evident to the son that a rich benediction had swept over his father's soul.

The cars sped swiftly along the highway the next morning on the way to Galilee. By late afternoon the Jordan River became visible as it flowed from Hermon's snow-capped peaks. At the boundary line between the French Syrian Mandate and British Palestine, the cars stopped for official inspection. While they waited Brother Bryan walked down to the Jordan's brink, pulled at the weeds growing in the water, and told his son of the sadness of the daughters of Jacob as they crossed this stream going into exile and the joy of the daughters as they came from exile home again. Even the return of the exiles from far-off Babylon could not have surpassed Brother Bryan's joy, as he knew that at last he was about to enter the Galilee of Jesus.

The sun had set before the border was past, and the first view of Galilee was in the soft light of evening. Brother Bryan was too full of thought to speak a word; his mind must have traveled back to the days when Jesus was there amid the multitude of sick and hungry, yes, the God-hungry men and women, and how the good Master fed and healed the multitudes.

Silently then, as daylight lasted, he turned to passage after passage of the Evangelists and read the stories about his Lord. As the night fell, the caravan arrived at Tiberius by the Sea of Galilee.

VI

AT SUPPER fish from the Sea of Galilee were upon the menu and Brother Bryan had many a favorable comment to make upon the taste of "Peter's fish." After the evening meal the tourist group went out beside the sea and, as the waning moon cast its beams across the lake, they sang together the hymns of the Saviour, who had loved beautiful Galilee. The son could see that his father was deeply moved, and, as they went back together to the hotel room, he was strangely silent.

The next morning Brother Bryan roused Harry early to go out with him and see the fishing boats draw up at the shore. While they looked at the little vessels pulling into wharf, he felt for some who seemingly had toiled all night and taken nothing. Brother Bryan wanted very much to talk with the fishermen of Galilee, for he was very anxious to know if while they were toiling on the sea they had thought of the Christ and the fishermen disciples of long ago. The barriers of language here seemed harder on him than at any other place. He was so close to his Master — and yet the strange tongue kept him so far away!

It was Sunday that morning at Tiberius. After breakfast the group journeyed on to Bethsaida and Capernaum. At Bethsaida he went down to the water's edge and picked up the stones to let them run through his fingers. At Capernaum under a grove of trees the morning service was held. Across the waters lay the land of Gadara, with its memories of the wild man from the

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tombs, yonder stood the Mount of Beatitudes; and away to the north was the spot where Jesus had fed the five thousand. Quietly he was taking it all in, as he worshiped that day at Capernaum, where Jesus "as His custom was" had gone also into the synagogue to worship on another Sabbath day. He had come a long way to know more about this wonderful land and now he must get it all for the others back in Birmingham.

Then they came to Nazareth. Christ was very real to him here. The plain Franciscan Monastery, where they stopped, in its bare simplicity carried him back to thoughts of his own frugal boyhood, but even more to that carpenter's home where Jesus lived. In the early mornings of the few days which they spent in Nazareth, he went early to the Virgin's fountain. There he would take a drink from the water where Jesus drank and would stand watching the women, with children tagging at their heels, come in their unaffected way to carry the jars of water for their households. While Harry stood there with him, the son would feel the father's hand grip his arm and he knew that Brother Bryan was seeing Mary and Jesus in some mother and lad filling vessels of water at the fountain. Later in the day, when the beggars congregated there asking the tourists for "bakshish" and insisted on posing for a picture, the fountain lost its charm for them. It was not thus commercialized when Jesus lived in Nazareth. Also in these early morning hours, before the party began the official sightseeing of the day, Brother Bryan delighted to walk through the narrow streets of Nazareth, and sometimes he would get a glimpse of a boy, about twelve years of age, sweeping up the chips from his father's carpentering of yesterday. The high hill behind Nazareth delighted him as from its top one could look out over a wide expanse. "No boy," said he, "who lived in Nazareth would miss the chance of going up that hill for the marvelous view." As he stood there, surrounded by the hills of Galilee, with the plains of Esdraelon below stretching out beyond Samaria, yonder in the distance Jerusalem, and on his right historic Mount Carmel, with the Mediterranean fading away into the distance, he told his son that he was sure Jesus

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had often gone to this same height and with the wide vision around Him thought and planned and dreamed concerning His Mission and Gospel to the world.

After Nazareth they began their journey up to Jerusalem. Every mile of the way was full of remembrance to this man who had lived so long with his Bible. As they passed the plain of Esdraelon, he saw again the march of armies and the tide of battle; at Shechem he looked up to Ebal and Gerizim and heard the "curses and blessings" from the law; when they stopped at Jacob's well he looked upon the unfinished church and remarked, "They haven't finished tearing away all that must have been here when Christ talked to the woman"; and all along the way there were memories of Samuel, Saul, David, and the prophets. Then the road made a quick bend and before them lay Jerusalem surrounded by her hills. That first view — how much it means to every traveler! Brother Bryan was ready to shout for joy. The doxology was on his lips and in his heart.

VII

ALL ALONG, his face had been set towards Jerusalem. If he had seen the city of David first, all the rest would have faded into insignificance. There was a whole week at Jerusalem. But one thing disappointed him here — just as all along the way he had keenly felt its inconsistency — and this was the gaudy churches erected on traditional sites of the sacred happenings. It worried him greatly that man had spoiled so much of the natural sacredness of the country. There were, however, certain spots which he felt were still unspoiled. He loved the peacefulness of the garden at Gordon's Calvary and the quiet of the Mount of Olives.

They did of course the customary things, which tourists never fail to do. There was the ride on donkey back around the walls of Jerusalem, which carried them down into the Valley of Hinnom. There was the morning spent at Bethlehem and the stops along the way. One day at dawn the party took the rapidly descending road from Jerusalem to Jericho and the Dead Sea that they might hurry back before the sweltering summer heat

swept the deep valley at noon. It was very hot in Jerusalem, and his son found the father willing to take unusual care of his health, for now there was one thought uppermost in his mind, he must get safely back to Birmingham to tell everybody about the wonderful things which he had seen.

One of the last nights in Jerusalem a member of the party suggested to Brother Bryan and Harry that the three of them quietly slip out to the Mount of Olives and spend a few hours in the Garden of Gethsemane, kept by the Franciscan monks. The night was dark and it was with some difficulty that they obtained admittance to the garden. As best he could Harry explained to the monk that "an old man who had traveled a long way" wished to visit Gethsemane by night. The kindly monk, as he looked upon the Christlike face of the elderly minister, could not refuse, so Brother Bryan, his son, and the friend entered the garden for a quiet time alone under the ancient olive trees so twisted and gnarled. Brother Bryan quoted many passages of Scripture and knelt to pray beside an old battered olive tree. His prayer revealed that he was entering in fellowship into the Master's passion in the garden, for he thanked God for such a Saviour and humbly pled that "we might love Him aright." When the hour was drawing late, the man who across the oceans in a great city had tried to follow Christ, again approached the garden gate and the kindly monk placed in his hands a small bunch of fresh flowers from the Garden of Gethsemane. Brother Bryan that night carefully pressed the flowers between the leaves of his Bible and prized them above all things which he collected on the journey.

VIII

WHEN he had seen Jerusalem he was ready to return to Birmingham by the swiftest route. Along the way he had collected little souvenirs, some pressed flowers here, a rock from this place and that, some leaves from the Mount of Olives, and a great sheaf of postcards. They were all to go to the friends who had made

possible this wonderful pilgrimage and now he could not wait to get home to tell them of it all. His mind and heart were full to overflowing. He had never doubted or attempted to sift the wheat from the chaff in the guides' talks, so there was so very much to tell.

Egypt, Cairo, and the pyramids were but a step towards home. His enthusiasm on the way home knew no bounds. On shipboard he was continually swapping tales with fellow passengers of his finds in the Holy Land. The journey had brought new life into his careworn frame. Thanks to the planning of the committee in Birmingham, all along the way he had had no cares. Harry had watched all troublesome details of strange money, hotels, and transportation, so that it had been a carefree journey for the father. It had accomplished for him all that the loving friends had hoped. At last he had had a real vacation.

When they landed in New York, he was ready for the first train to Birmingham. The morning newspapers came out with a notice that Brother Bryan would be home that afternoon at three o'clock. When the train pulled under the Birmingham shed, the station was packed with people and both the police and fireman's bands were playing a welcome for him. Then at the gates appeared the aged minister and his son, both with faces wreathed in smiles. When the crowd rushed forward to greet him, in that characteristic manner they knew so well, he lifted his hands and said, "Let us pray."

The brief statement he gave the reporters told how deeply he felt: "We return to the city of our greatest love with hearts filled with gratitude to God and to you all. My impressions of Palestine will remain as long as my life, holy, helpful, and thrilling. Everything I saw and studied confirmed deeper my faith in Jesus, my Lord, and in the Bible."

He had come back to tell the people of Birmingham of his experiences, and now six years later he has not grown tired of talking of that wonderful journey to the land his Master trod.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HIS CHRIST

I

“**B**ROTHER BRYAN, you belong to Birmingham,” remarked a friend to him one day. “Madame,” he replied quickly, “I hope I belong to the Lord.” Jesus Christ is at the center of his religious life. “If I had but one text,” Brother Bryan has often said, “it is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I need no other.” Christ is to him the great reality. He lives each day conscious of his Master’s intimate presence. In fact, he has lived so close to Christ through the years that many people think that his face has come to look like the traditional features of Jesus.

A specialist in the city keeps watch over his eyesight. Every so often he stops Brother Bryan on the street and forces him into his office for an examination. “I have to tell him that he is a great sinner against his own body before I can do anything with him,” the physician explains. “We never let him know what his glasses cost, for he has very difficult eyes to fit with lenses. The last pair cost \$70.00 at the optical company.” Then the doctor, who has known him intimately for years and has an oil portrait of Dr. Bryan hanging in his office, said, “You know he can’t keep away from Jesus Christ for five minutes.”

At the heart of all of his preaching is his faith in the salvation provided for sinful men in Jesus Christ. A glance through his short sermons, which are printed each week in the Saturday edition of the *Birmingham Post*, shows such headlines as these: “Brother Bryan tells what Christ means to him, in Weekly Message”; “Pastor declares that secret of Christian character is the ability to trust and love Jesus Christ the Saviour”; “Christ cannot be hidden is the great lesson for the world today”;

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“Christ’s whosoever means all, says Bryan”; “Jesus’ love will not fail those who seek Him, says the Pastor”; “Salvation in Christ will save the world, declares Brother Bryan”; “Christ has promised to help in time of trouble, Brother Bryan says”; “Christ’s suffering helps when the world’s trials are heavy.” Not only do the subjects indicate Christ, but the message of Christ is contained in every one of them.

“I believe in Jesus Christ,” he says, “because I know He stands by me. How do I know? I know because He has done so all the years of my life.

“I believe in Jesus Christ, because He never fails me nor forsakes me, regardless of what my condition may be. If I am in the deepest poverty, He is the same Christ that He is when I am blessed with the world’s treasures. If I am sick, He is the same Christ that He is when I am well and strong. When my heart aches and is crushed, He is the same Christ as when I am filled with joy. Nay, He will never fail me nor forsake me. I believe in Him because of His one and the same attitude to all people. With Him there is no respect of persons. He has no aristocratic circles in His house. His only aristocracy is the one of holiness. His life is holy.

“I believe in Jesus Christ because He loves people like you and me. I love Him because His invitation is to whosoever will. That whosoever is to you and me.”

II

JACK YORK, a young newspaper man of Birmingham, tells that the most interesting experience of his twelve years as a reporter was the time he persuaded Brother Bryan to go with him to the theater to see the picture *The King of Kings*. “You know,” said Mr. York, “that I do not come of too religious a family and to me the Bible is just a wonderful book, but the nearest I ever came to being close to Christ was when I was sitting at Brother Bryan’s side in the theater that day.”

Brother Bryan had never found time to see a moving picture show, for life had been moving too swiftly as a reality under his very eyes for him to ever take time off to look upon mere pictures on a screen; and then he had his doubts about picture shows and theaters anyway, but his newspaper friend, Jack York, was determined to take him to see this picture of the life of Christ. It took no little persuasion to get him to go, but Mr. York was a persistent fellow. Finally when his reporter friend told him that he would again see the Holy Land and the imaginative reproduction of the events in Jesus' own life in that land, he began to weaken. "It won't take too long, will it?" he asked — a little doubtful whether he should spend so much time away from his work.

Jack York described for the newspaper the next day his experience with Brother Bryan, and with slight changes his story is reproduced on these pages. Finally the elderly minister and the youthful reporter arrived at the theater and took two of the best seats in the house. As the picture got under way Brother Bryan lost all thought of time, for he was returning in imagination to that sacred land where he had made his memorable pilgrimage just a few months before — the land in which his Master had lived and died. As scene after scene flashed before him on the canvas, he murmured, "Isn't it wonderful!"

In the picture Brother Bryan saw his Master vividly portrayed in the flesh. As the screen showed Jesus in the act of healing a blind girl, Brother Bryan gripped the reporter's arm, "Isn't it wonderful," he breathed, awestruck. When the picture showed the casting out of the demons from Mary Magdalene, his joy reached its zenith. Here were the very words of his Bible, being pictured just as they actually happened. Scene after scene flashed before him, bringing back memories of the land which he had looked upon but a few months before. Up from the Sea of Galilee came the Master with His faithful disciples to rest at the home of a carpenter, whose son was a lunatic, and at a gesture of the Christ the child was healed. "That's right, that's right," said Brother Bryan enthusiastically, "the Bible says that." Then

came the scene where Mary and Martha of Bethany were in their sorrow, and a subtitle read "Thy brother shall live again." When it showed Jesus standing in the tomb beside the bier of Lazarus, "That is just like I saw it, just the same as the guide pointed it out to me in Bethany the other day."

Soon the eyes of the people seated near him in the theater began to turn from the picture to the grand old man of Birmingham, who was so visibly living again the story of his Lord. Brother Bryan was back across the centuries with the Master in Palestine. When Christ was shown compelling the money-changers and traders in cattle to leave the temple area, he murmured, "Christ militant! Christ victorious! Bless us, Lord!"

Then they came to the second part of the picture, which showed Christ before the High Priest, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and finally the crucifixion. Brother Bryan was silent now. His soul was so gripped that no word escaped his lips. The sorrow of it all enveloped him and deep lines came in his face when Christ was scourged, condemned, and finally crucified. He sighed deeply and rested his head on his hands as he gazed sorrowfully at the screen. When they commanded Jesus to lie down on the cross, preparatory to piercing His hands and feet with the spikes, Brother Bryan's lips moved in prayer. Suddenly the crucifixion was complete and the three crosses raised. Then followed the stage effect of rumbling thunder and crash of lighting as the drums roared. It showed destruction, the rending of the temple veil, the storm and the earthquake which followed. Brother Bryan sat forward on the edge of his chair. He was amazed, startled. When the multitudes in the picture began to pray for the storm to leave, Brother Bryan did a characteristic thing, he bowed his head with tears streaming down his face and prayed with them. At that moment by a freak chance, the operator accidentally bumped the door of his booth open and from a tiny crack in the door a beam of light from the projector fell directly on his head. The effect was startling. A woman's voice was heard, "My God, look at that light on Brother Bryan's face!" but he was unconscious of those gazing at him, for now he was there suffering with his Lord.

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Then came the resurrection, the doubting of Thomas, the appearance of the Lord to His apostles, and Jesus talking with Mary Magdalene. It was all over, and as Jack York took the arm of his friend to lead him from the theater, Brother Bryan asked timidly, "There was no one hurt in that earthquake?" When the two arrived at the minister's home, Brother Bryan thanked Jack York for taking him to the picture and then bowing his head he also thanked God.

When later Mr. York described his unique experience, he wrote:

"Brother Bryan walked with Christ, taught with Him, and prayed with Him. He suffered the agony of the scourge and of the crown of thorns with his Lord. He walked the way of the cross with Him, and each cruel blow as the nails were driven into His hands and feet were felt by him, and likewise did he glory in His resurrection."

III

IN MAY, 1930, a reporter of the *Birmingham Post*, which prints each week in Saturday's edition a short sermon by Brother Bryan, requested him instead of his usual message to tell what Christ had done for him during his life. Taking for a text Philippians 4:19, "And my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," Brother Bryan wrote this testimony as to what Christ had meant to him.

"I am to study with you what Christ means to me. Words cannot express what Christ has meant and does mean to my life for nearly sixty years. Books can never tell it. Songs can never tell it. Artists can never put it on canvas. He has been the all to the writer. In sorrow He has been my comfort. In trouble He has been my stay. In need He has been my supply. In darkness He has been my light. In the rough places He has been my guide.

"When I have almost despaired and fallen, He has kept me from falling. He has preserved my going out and my coming in. We think of Him, and rightly so, as our only Saviour from sin and all its direful consequences. So said the angel in the annunciation: 'His name shall be called Jesus for He shall save His people from

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their sins.' We think of Him as our Redeemer, because in Him we have redemption from sin through His shed blood, His atoning blood. His blood is the ground of our redemption, and faith is the means.

"We think of Him as being our deliverer from sin. The blood over the doorposts in Egypt was a sign of redemption, but the Israelites were not delivered from the power of the devil. This was evidenced by their experience with the Amalekites after they had crossed the Red Sea and wandered on into another country. We are responsible for the power which the devil has over our lives. In the first place, we must not give him a chance to creep into our lives. This we can do only when Christ is our all and in all.

"Christ has been the sufficient Christ to me in temptations. He knows the feelings of our infirmities, the weaknesses of humanity, because He lived on earth in flesh and was tempted as we are. And so He says, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in thy weakness.' Christ to me has been my Mediator. It is truly wonderful to think of the fact that if we sin we have an advocate, a mediator, even Jesus Christ the righteous. It is wonderful to think that He pleads for us poor, failing, falling, believing sinners.

"He has been my helper. Many times when I did not know where to turn, I would think of Him and He would say, 'I will strengthen thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.' Many times when I was a student at Princeton, I was without means and money and tried in many ways, discouraged, but Christ never failed to help me. Many times in a pastorate of nearly forty-one years, where trials have met me at every turn of the way and discouragements assailed me, Christ has always helped me, He has never deserted me to my foes.

"All of these things I have written you out of my life. But I wish to place the emphasis on the fact that He, Christ, has meant to me the supplier of all my temporal and spiritual needs. I have prayed as He teaches us, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' I am not bragging or boasting when I tell you that He has done so. To me He has verified the promise in Philippians 4:19, 'But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'

"When I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary, God, through friends, gave me clothes to wear and money to pay my board. I am sure the devil did not do it. God gave me physical strength to take the course, which has meant everything to me. Since accepting

pastoral duties, volumes could not hold, the evidences of word cannot and could not tell, what Christ has meant to me not only in temporal needs but in a spiritual way.

"He has sustained me through temptations, trials, sorrows, really through all the tragedies and blood and tears of this world, and increased my faith and hope of eternal life. To me He has been the author and finisher of my faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross. This to me has made me endlessly patient, more heroic in His cause, and above all happy in Him.

"The friends, whom Christ has given me throughout this country to help me do the work I have been doing as a pastor, mean more to me I suppose than to anybody on earth. He has raised up friends for this little church when it was burned out, and enabled us to build another without a debt or even a subscription, for God sent me that the Gospel might be preached to the poor. My heart overflows when I write this humbly, with a small dot over a small I, that it was Christ who did it, for Christ has meant everything to this church and to this pastor.

"I never think of my own life without thinking of a verse in the sixth chapter of Matthew: 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you? Take no thought for these things, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.'

"It may not be right in me to write you some of these things, but I know that Christ has done all these things for me, and you asked me to write on what Christ has meant to me, which, as I have already told you, would fill volumes. He has been precious, the most precious of all to me. He has been faithful and true to me. I really think He has meant more to me in giving me my friends than in anything else I could write of now. He has given me friends who stayed by me in the darkest hours of my life, many of whom are sleeping in Elmwood, Oak Hill and Forest Hill cemeteries, and some in the potter's field.

"At the same time I am still blessed with friends, whom God gives me to cheer me along when I am about to give up. But Christ Himself has meant the greatest Friend of all. It is He who sticks closer to



Courtesy W. R. Jenkins

STATUE OF BROTHER BRYAN

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me than a brother. He to me is the Friend of friends. Really, He means so much to me that no one else can take His place. I can't find anyone else who can take His place, and, if I could, I would not. In all these years He has been the same to me, and He says to me as I write, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the ages.'"

In a quiet talk with the author of this book on August 3, 1931, Brother Bryan reverently made this statement: "If I have held back one thing from Christ, I do not know it. I say this humbly." Have we not here the inner secret of the Christlike life of such remarkable influence? Is not this the talisman of "Religion in Shoes"? And still he labors on, like the godly man of the psalmist, still bringing forth fruit in old age.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
THE SUNSET TIME

“ . . . it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”

— ZECHARIAH 14:7

I

IT was in 1931 that the author, while gathering information for this book, *RELIGION IN SHOES*, had the high privilege for a few weeks of keeping company with this man of God. Brother Bryan was then sixty-eight years old, but he was granted almost ten more years to live in his beloved Birmingham.

By now his life was so intimately tied in with his varied interests in and around Birmingham that it became increasingly difficult for him to find time for everything. You had to persuade him harder than ever to get him away from home for an extended appointment in another city, for he continually was leaving so many things undone in Birmingham. He frequently went through the day making trips here and there, returning late at night, after giving his “lecture” on Palestine. Since his lifelong passion had ever been to get the “good news” of God’s love in Christ to the multitudes, he found now the radio his most effective means. Radio stations have always been responsive to the public’s demands, and for a long time it was the unsolved mystery in the radio centers of Birmingham why this aged minister, with nothing but his heart of overflowing love and his simple message of the Christ, had for years maintained the greatest audience appeal of any Birmingham radio personality. As to no one else the studios opened their doors without cost to this man for whose voice the people waited so patiently, until, for the last ten years

of his active ministry, he spoke by radio on the average some dozen times each week.

Then the demand kept growing for articles from Brother Bryan in labor publications, weekly newspapers, and other publications. It taxed even his ingenuity to get all this writing done. He solved much of the problem of writing by having a stenographer who worked in her own home take down radio messages for later use. Then, trusting in the accuracy of the typist so implicitly that he never took time personally to look it over for correction, it was sent just as it had been typed to be printed in some paper. But there was one message which demanded more careful preparation. For fourteen years, up until the last Saturday before his death, he had written a message for all of Birmingham which appeared each Saturday afternoon on the church page of the *Birmingham Post*. He labored long over this message, whether in sickness or in health, and dictated it carefully to his stenographer. His last message on January 21, 1941, though written from his bed in extreme feebleness of both mind and body, sums up in a way all that he had ever said or written. The subject was "God's Love," and he wrote: "God's love has a depth without a bottom. I do not always do things because they are pleasant, but because this great love of Christ, my Saviour, constraineth me to do these things for Him. To follow Christ I must first rid myself of selfishness. I must rid myself of false pride. I must rid myself of egotism. I must take up the cross of Christ. Surely the love of God constraineth us to do His work. O Love, that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee."

The work for Christ, however, still needed to be extended. He planned for new mission stations and Sunday schools. Several of these were organized in the neglected areas of the city and county, and have since grown into churches. He enlarged his plans for Negro work and developed his Negro kindergarten so that it could care for more of the little boys and girls. During all these last years, in ever-increasing numbers, young men and women came to have him tie the knot which united them as husband and wife, for somehow a sense of benediction rested over

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the wedding at which he officiated. Then there were the funerals, for as his ministry widened and more people knew his voice over the radio, there was no voice which could substitute for his in bringing comfort in the hour of sorrow.

There could be no wonder that under the strain his body was wearing out. The heavy toil at last was taking its toll.

II

THE FATHER in Birmingham had part of his heart in far-off Japan, where his son Harry was beginning his missionary work. It did not take Brother Bryan long to adjust himself so that he entered fully into the experiences of his son, who was making the same Christ known to men in a far-off land. Of course, he did have some difficulty in remembering that it took a more expensive stamp to deliver a postal card across the ocean. Friends soon took care of this, and postal cards with the correct stamps were always available on his desk to bear a word to Harry. His messages were usually brief, no more than a postal card would hold. These cards, written in his own hand, usually carried a Bible verse with a brief comment, a thanksgiving to God, some statement about his own work, and a bit of advice to the boy in his new environment. He was keenly interested in Harry's study of the Japanese language. Frequently, even though he knew nothing of this foreign tongue, there would be advice about learning the vocabulary or grammar.

At 2 P.M. on June 18, 1932, a grandson who bore his name arrived in Tokyo. By previous arrangement, a cabled message was sent from Tokyo. It happened to leave at 5 P.M. on Saturday, and arrived in Birmingham just as the family were rising from breakfast on the Saturday of the same date. Brother Bryan immediately called the newspapers, which in the noon edition announced the arrival of James Alexander Bryan II in Japan. Brother Bryan never failed to tell with glee how the announcement of the birth of James Alexander Bryan II was in the Birmingham papers on Saturday at noon when the baby did not

arrive at the hospital in Tokyo until 2 P.M. on Saturday of the same date.

After a few years in Japan, Harry's wife had a siege of ill health. During those months of illness the father wrote longer messages — letters now. These meant much to the little family in Japan, far from home. Said Harry, "Then he was especially for us a tower of strength, upholding us and assuring us that even if there were this time of sickness we should not be discouraged."

In his letters he began to call his work "Alabama Inland Mission." He would compare his trips around Birmingham with his son's journeys of from ten to fifty miles to keep appointments in Japan. Through all that area of Alabama, Brother Bryan told the story of Harry's work in Japan and arranged prayer circles to pray for the missionaries. Today, the missionary son, who was forced by the imminent outbreak of hostilities to take up work in the homeland, says that wherever he goes in Alabama someone will relate a story about Japan which his father had told in one of his sermons. Japan and Alabama, and all the rest of the world as well, were for Brother Bryan the vineyard of the Lord, into which the laborers had been sent to gather fruit.

III

AT ONE of the busiest intersections of Birmingham on a central grass plot there stands a unique statue — Brother Bryan kneeling with uplifted face, in prayer. It happened thus: the Public Works Administration in 1934 commissioned the sculptor, Georges Bridges, to create an art project for the city, giving him freedom to select such worthy subject as he might choose. There were many suggestions for the statue. Some said it should be that of a prominent banker. Others thought of a great industrialist or civic leader. But the artist, who had lived in the city for some years as an industrial artist, had long admired Brother Bryan. He said that continually there ran through his mind the questions, "What did they give? Who gave the most?" Finally it

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seemed perfectly clear that there was only one who had given most — the aged clergyman who for so long had ministered to all of Birmingham.

No one told either Brother Bryan or any member of his family about the project for this statue until plans were far advanced. Georges Bridges had sculptured a bronze head of Brother Bryan not long before, and attended the services in his church to study his features minutely. He had no difficulty deciding that the most characteristic thing about the man was the way he prayed, and so the statue should represent Brother Bryan in that familiar posture upon his knees in prayer. The artist told how he bought an old overcoat and a long muffler such as Brother Bryan used on his rounds of mercy in cold weather. He put these on an assistant and had him pose for the lines and form. The face and hands were so stamped in the memory of the artist that he fashioned these from memory, and from the bronze head. The plaster model was finished when the Bryan family first heard anything of the statue. Then, from the plaster model, the artist carved the figure into Alabama white marble, the proportions somewhat larger than life-size. The life of Brother Bryan had been lived down where men move, and therefore this marble of "Religion in Shoes" was placed where the paths of men meet and pass. The artist sought to make this not a statue of a person, but rather, a symbol of the spirit of this man of God.

The dedication service was held on July 29, 1934, at the Highlands Methodist Church near the intersection at Five Points where the unveiling was to take place. When the big church that Sunday afternoon was packed to the doors, the man whom all had come to honor could not be found. He had slipped in unobtrusively and was sitting back in the audience, from which place an usher led him to the platform. Senator Hugo L. Black, later Justice of the United States Supreme Court, was the orator of the occasion. Among other things he said that day was: "This dedication raises our community to its loftiest heights. The statue, let us hope, will inspire those here today, and those also who know Brother Bryan, to love our neighbor as ourselves."

There at Five Points, at the first rise as one heads south from the center of the city, where traffic flows on and on as if it will never end, chiseled in white marble, is this kneeling figure. Forever it will speak to coming generations of a man whose life for the city was a benediction and whose prayers lifted its citizens a bit nearer to their Father God, calling them from the rush of business and the hum of industry toward that heavenly city with foundations which abide, whose builder and maker is God.

IV

Such labors could not continue forever. It became quite noticeable how the energies at last were slowing down. Brother Bryan always had felt so really and so deeply that his emotions were easily stirred. Now he had more difficulty in controlling his sensitive emotional nature, until frequently both tears and laughter appeared unexpectedly.

Ernie Pyle, the well-known commentator, visited him when he was seventy-three years old, some eighteen months before he became an invalid. He wrote in January 1936 an article for the *Washington Daily News* under the caption: "Portrait of a Good Samaritan: Brother Bryan of Birmingham," in which he said:

"As soon as you land in Birmingham you hear of Brother Bryan. Everyone knows him. He is a tradition . . . They think of him as the one man who lives as the best of us profess to live, but don't.

"I went to see Brother Bryan. He is getting old now, and you might say, a little childish. But he is no crank. He is an educated, sincere man. He's merely explosive, vociferous, and emotional.

"I found him in his little study, with its linoleum on the floor and its coal stove. I told him who I was.

"'Oh, God bless you, God bless you,' he shouted. 'I'm so glad you came. You boys are so good to me. You and the radio boys, you're so good to me . . .'

"Brother Bryan started to cry. He is a tall, big man with a white beard, and very old; when he cries he screws his face up like a baby and runs his hands through his white hair.

"It frightened me at first. But in the next half hour Brother Bryan cried and laughed so many times, each time so suddenly and heartily, that I kept behind with my sympathetic facial expressions, and would still be looking solemn when Brother Bryan was roaring with laughter . . . Despite his age, Brother Bryan's activities right now would make a football player look like an invalid."

By the summer of 1937 it was evident that his strength was rapidly failing. He could not walk with comfort and frequently would sit to preach. His preacher son, Thomas, came home on a vacation and planned to help him with his work, but instead of easing up, in the enthusiasm of having his son with him to preach he took on more engagements.

Finally, Mrs. Bryan could stand it no longer. She had to get him to the doctor, but he insisted that he had no time available in which to get sick. Then she told the Session of his church that they had to help get him to submit to some kind of medical treatment. It was the duty of the elders, she said, and if they didn't manage to get him to the hospital, she would be very disappointed in them.

So on the next Sunday after church the Session met to determine how they could deal with their pastor. They told him that it was his Christian duty to attend to his own health, that he would just have to go to the hospital and let the doctors give him a complete medical examination. He protested that there was no time to be ill, and so much work to do. They told him that the elders themselves would see that his work was carried on and that he had to go.

Finally he said, "Yes, I know. I should let the doctors go over me thoroughly and try to help me. But this afternoon at two o'clock I have a funeral. After that I promised to visit a sick friend out in the country. Tonight I must preach at our church. There is nobody to take my place at the radio station in the morning. I am due at the school at 9:30 A.M., at the Overall Factory at 11 A.M.; and at the L and N Railroad shops at noon. I tell you what I'll do. I will meet you at one o'clock and you can take me to any doctor you wish me to see."

His officers agreed to this. Next day one came for him at the appointed hour and took him to the doctor. He walked into the room and lay down on the table for the preliminary examination. Then the body seemed just to quit, for it had been going long and hard. He was never able again to stand alone.

V

His last years of ministering to Birmingham were from his sickbed. During these days of invalidism he continued to hope that he would be up and at his work next week. Each Saturday he would be forced to agree that he was unable to go to church the next day, but he always sent a message to the congregation to expect him on the next Sunday. Birmingham watched, too, for his recovery, and the newspapers kept the people informed of his health. Every once in a while a newspaper statement such as "Brother Bryan walks for the first time in eleven weeks," would send a thrill of encouragement through the city, but he was never well again.

From his sickbed, however, he carried on still a remarkable ministry for his city. With the help of friends and the co-operation of the Home Missions Committee of Birmingham Presbytery he purchased a used school bus and sent it regularly to neglected sections of the city to bring children to his church. He continued to dictate messages for the papers, especially each week for the church page of the *Birmingham Post*. Occasionally one of the radio centers would have a microphone placed by his bed and his well-known voice, now weakened by illness, would carry a message of God to the people. Young people came, two couples on an average each week, to have him officiate at the holy moment of their marriage. Parents from time to time insisted that they should bring their children to him that his hands might be laid upon the child for baptism and his voice might invoke God's benediction. Sometimes an individual who had found the Saviour came to the bedside, that thus he might acknowledge Christ as the Saviour and receive baptism and be welcomed into the Christian Church. Then there were the times when the troubled souls

came for help. The nurse would be sent from the room, and behind closed doors Brother Bryan would talk intimately, as he knew so well how to do, with a perplexed individual and then bring the problems of life before the all-wise and all-loving heavenly Father.

There, also, came the multitudes of friends. Sometimes he was able to see them; frequently only a few were permitted to enter. They brought him gifts of every description and kind. They came from every faith and every walk of life. No one was more welcome at the bedside than Rabbi Newfield of Temple Emanuel. For years these two had been devoted friends, and frequently the Rabbi and the minister would sit down together with their Hebrew Bibles to translate for themselves afresh some Old Testament passage, seeking a clearer and more significant meaning. They died within a few months of one another. A short time before Rabbi Newfield's death he took the flowers from the altar of the synagogue at his last Yom Kippur service and carried them to the bedside of his friend.

In 1939 the missionary son, Harry, had a year of furlough in the homeland. His father was a little stronger for a time, and Harry could roll him out in a wheel chair. Sometimes they would lift him into an automobile and he would ride again about the city he had served so long. Some Sundays he was even strong enough to be taken to his church, and invariably he would speak a brief message to the people as he sat in the wheelchair, and he always prayed.

It was about this time that Rev. James Cantrell was appointed Associate Minister of the Third Presbyterian Church. He was one of Brother Bryan's own boys. Early in life, by an accident, he had lost one leg. One Sunday Brother Bryan found the rather disconsolate newsboy sitting on a doorstep and asked him to come to Sunday school. There was the objection that all his papers were not sold. He was told, "If you will come to Sunday school I'll give you a quarter." As the boy was making a rush for the door after Sunday school Brother Bryan stopped him and said, "I gave you a quarter to come to Sunday school; if you are

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a gentleman you will stay for church, too." He did. James Cantrell was Brother Bryan's friend from that hour on. As he grew up he was one of the many boys whom Brother Bryan helped through college. When he was big enough to drive a car, he became the chauffeur, and together they gathered food for the hungry, visited the sick and the imprisoned, and drove over all the surrounding area to preach the Gospel of Christ. James Cantrell decided to be a preacher, and Brother Bryan arranged for him to go to Columbia Theological Seminary, where his own sons had prepared for the ministry. In 1939 James Cantrell had finished his preparation. He was elected Associate Pastor with Brother Bryan in the Third Presbyterian Church. Harry, the missionary, was at home for the installation, and the old minister in his wheel chair was exceedingly joyful as Rev. James S. Cantrell was ordained and installed to work with him. From that day on, he and Jimmy Cantrell planned the work together. Jimmy reported to him on the successes and failures.

With the help of Rev. J. S. Mansfield as Superintendent, a community center where decrepit, homeless, and unemployed men might take refuge was projected. The Brother Bryan Community Center still continues with an unbroken record of nightly religious services and care for men in need.

The observance of his Golden Anniversary was the greatest event of these years of invalidism. A committee of one hundred leading citizens of Birmingham planned that this celebration should be the largest mass tribute ever paid a living man in the history of the city. All races and every walk of life were to be represented. It was held in the Municipal Auditorium from 1:30 to 3:30 P.M. on Sunday afternoon, June 28, 1939. The program began with band music and hymn singing, which were followed by messages of appreciation. The great building was packed with a throng of more than four thousand people. They had brought the old minister in an ambulance and he sat on the platform in a wheel chair, with his wife seated beside him. It was for him a great day. His face was wreathed with smiles in this gathering of friends. Fifty years in any life is a long time,

and both Birmingham and Brother Bryan had come a long journey. Some speaker asked all to stand who had had a personal visit from Brother Bryan in their homes, and more than half of the four thousand in the audience rose to their feet. A reporter had estimated that in fifty years Brother Bryan had married ten thousand couples. A half century before, a slim lad had stepped from a train into a village in the great steel valley, with a purpose to serve God and his fellow men. Now the village was an industrial metropolis; and here in their biggest auditorium they were honoring the man who had kept faith with his initial purpose. His brief statement that day to the newspapers had these words: "No one has loved a city or a congregation as I have loved you all, and as I do love you." Perhaps, after all, love is the most powerful thing in the world.

Soon sorrow struck. For forty-nine years Mrs. Bryan had been his constant helper. She had understood him as had no one else. She had managed the finances, reared the children, and maintained his home as a sure refuge from the storm. For several years her health had been failing, but each time she would return from the hospital to take up her work again. Now, on the afternoon of March 4, 1940, she slipped away quietly. It was a terrific blow; but the son in far-off Japan has written that his father's messages at this time were some of the strongest expressions of faith he ever remembered reading. Before the funeral at the church a simple home service was held for the immediate family and a few friends. The husband in his wheel chair and Thomas, the only minister son who could be present, were together at the head of the casket and led a service of praise and faith and joy in God. During the following months, from time to time, as he was able, the ambulance drivers of the city would come on a sunny day and lift the invalid minister into an ambulance and drive him to the cemetery where his wife was buried. They would lift him out tenderly on a stretcher and place him beside the last resting place of his helpmeet, and then after a few moments, when he had prayed, he would be taken again to his home and to bed.

It was during these years of illness that war tore asunder our civilization. Brother Bryan followed the trend of European affairs with great interest, watched every move, read what he could in the papers, and listened continually to the war news as it came over the radio. He was tremendously concerned when war came with Japan, for whose evangelization he had prayed so earnestly, and to which he had sent his son. Those who were present on one of his last appearances in the wheel chair in his church will never forget the fervor and the faith with which he prayed God for peace.

His son James overheard him say, "So many people," during his last few minutes on earth, and thinking that he was referring to the fact that too many people were in the room, asked him if he wanted them to leave. He said, "So many people without Christ."

VI

One day the newspapers reported: "At Brother Bryan's home today there is an atmosphere of peace. Brother Bryan died there last night, January 28, 1941, and to those who knew this man during his lifetime, his cheerful spirit, his unselfish service, his ceaseless devotion, it is as it should be."

The whole city was in sorrow. The best friend of everybody had passed to the land beyond. Lovingly and reverently their last tribute must be paid. Thousands would wish a last glimpse of that gentle face which all knew so well, so they placed his casket before the pulpit of his church, banked on every side with flowers. His close friends, the police and firemen, in relays kept honor guard behind the casket, and then through the hours of day and night the multitude sorrowfully passed by. Every undertaker in the city asked for some part in the service, and all were invited to assist. At one of his last requests, and by a long-standing agreement with the firemen, his body was to be carried to its last resting place on a fire truck. A big red fire truck was the hearse.

RELIGION IN SHOES

Two hours before the service the church was packed. Thousands were gathered in the streets to hear the words of comfort over the public address system. They came from every social stratum and age group. In that throng were all kinds of people — saints and sinners, rich and poor, folks in fine raiment and others in patched clothing. Jews, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholics, and Protestants were there — all reverent and very sad and thoughtful. Traffic was stopped a block in all directions.

At three o'clock the flag over the City Hall came to half-mast; stores closed in downtown Birmingham; some factories stopped the wheels, and the simple service began. The minister son, Reverend Thomas C. Bryan, and the Reverend James S. Cantrell, the former crippled newsboy and now the Associate Pastor, took the service. It was what he would have wished, an expression of faith, assurance, confidence in Christ's salvation. Afterwards they laid the casket on the big red fire truck and carried his body to the cemetery to be buried with that of his wife.

He left in cash \$180.00. From this bank account the children wrote two checks — one for \$90.00 to his nurse, and the other for the same amount to the Associate Pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church.

On this earth a life of almost seventy-eight years had now ended. But if mortal eyes could have seen and human ears could have heard, across the intervening shadows, John Bunyan's description of Christian's entrance would have been repeated, as the gates opened and the crown of victory was brought forth, and we would have heard "that all the bells in the City rang again for joy, and that it was said unto him, 'Enter ye into the joy of our Lord.'"

Religion in Shoes

BROTHER BRYAN OF BIRMINGHAM

by Hunter B. Blakely

Brother Bryan was the shepherd of the tiny Third Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, Alabama, but his flock was that entire industrial city. His story is not written in his theological utterances or his participation in Church courts. It is written in the lives of thousands who saw God through him. Rich and poor, saint and sinner, they all pass through the pages of this book as Brother Bryan ministers to them in Christ's name.

A simple prayer on a street corner or words of hope spoken across lunch pails in a busy factory touched the hearts of many. To pray with the bandit who tried to rob him was characteristic of Brother Bryan. Since he had only one suit to offer three men in need of clothing and he never refused anyone in need, he gave one the trousers, another the coat, and the third the vest. An all-day ministerial conference on evangelism was endured by energetic Brother Bryan only because he could snatch a few minutes at the noon hour to get a commitment from a man at a nearby factory who had not yet confessed Christ.

Incidents such as these only hint at the loving and selfless ministry of Brother Bryan. All of Birmingham could echo the words of one of his fellow citizens who said, "I have never seen a man who caught the message of Jesus and illustrated it so tenderly and gently and splendidly as Brother Bryan."

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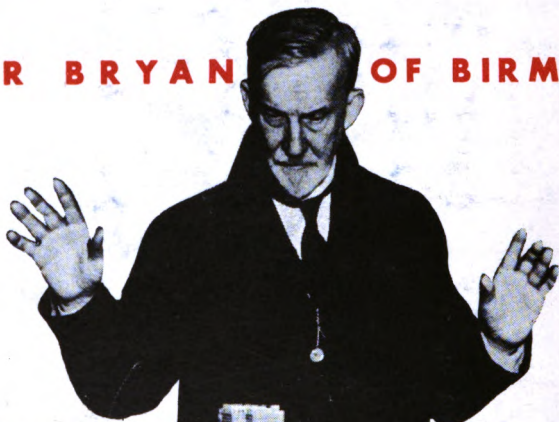
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Religion in Shoes

BROTHER BRYAN OF BIRMINGHAM



by HUNTER B. BLAKELY

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