

## CHAPTER TEN

### Fighting The Good Fight

My diary, kept during teen-age days, reveals that for me, it was a period of unusual turmoil. What every child needs most, the thing he wants and thrives on best, is to have a mother and a father who love him and also love one another. I did well in school but hated special days when the parents were invited. Other girls proudly walked the school halls with their Mothers but I wished for a trip to Mars.

In conversation one time with one of Mrs. H.'s friends, I remarked that Mrs. H. never commented approvingly, never conceded that I had done well in school even if I had. The friend replied, "She may not say it to you but she has mentioned it at the bridge club. She seemed quite proud of your school record." To know that she approved even a little, pleased me greatly.

#### FAITH UNDER FIRE

My religious views and practices were ever subject to criticism. I have no memory of approval on that score. In all discussions on the subject I was bound to lose.

The H. family always said grace at their meals Their boy often rattled off the Latin grace that was used at the private school. His Father would demand

that it be repeated in English, then demand that it be repeated more slowly. Finally, not only God but all of us knew our gratitude had been expressed.

The first time I was asked to say grace, I repeated what we had always said at the Lindahl table. It was not so much a set grace as a prayer, and in it was, 'Bless this food to the nourishing of our bodies and us to Thy service.' Mr. H. looked up in amazement, "Why she says it just like my old man used to say it."

From what he said about his Father I gradually formed a picture of him in my mind. He was a Bible-believing, God-fearing man. He gave generously to the church during his life time and in his old age had little of this world's goods. His son felt that his Father's religion had been a liability and did not intend to so burden himself.

They were sure I was ruining my life with religion. They were certain that Pentecostal pulpits were filled by racketeers and that the pews were filled with people who had failed in business or in love or had lost their health. When I turned down an invitation to a Scout Dance and consistently refused to attend all school dances, Mrs. H. prophesied that I would be an old maid. Not just an old maid—an unhappy old maid! Furthermore she declared that it was impossible for me to be a good school teacher as long as I held to my old-fashioned ideas.

By the time I had finished one year of university and was in Teacher's College, other girls from our neighborhood were developing into social belles. The girl next door drew forth the praise of her parents and the admiration of the neighbors by being able

to drink a fair number of cocktails at a party and still conduct herself as a lady. When compared with her, I did not show off well. Inwardly I wished they would turn the spotlight on each of us at school. There I did not fall behind.

When it came to taking a cocktail, Mr. H. said, "Are you afraid that you have a weak background and through social drinking you might turn into a drunkard?" Any mention of my background was a touchy subject with me. For all I knew I might have been hatched in a cabbage patch. Defensively, Mr. H. asked me one time if I had ever seen anyone drunk in their house.

My answer was, "No."

He said he thought liquor was used in their home like it ought to be used—in moderation. My ideal was a home where there was no alcoholic beverage at all. Because of my decision to live for Christ it had not been necessary for me to sign a temperance pledge. I wanted nothing at all to do with strong drink.

At one of their parties, a friend of the family, with glass in hand came into the den where I was doing my homework, and said, "Have a sip. It is just a harmless cocktail. There is hardly any alcohol in it." I told her that I had seen enough liquor in the Gerard household to last me a lifetime. Sometime later, at a wedding, I enjoyed generous helpings of ice cream and freely imbibed the punch. Later Mr. H. laughed heartily at some of the wedding guests who were too holy to drink liquor but had enjoyed the punch—he had spiked the punch!

Any reference to my background always upset me

a little. References to my looks affected me the same way. I would not use make-up. Mrs. H. used to say that anyone as homely as I should do all possible to improve on nature's meager endowment. I couldn't argue for my own good looks. She had the facts of the case before her. But my idea of placing emphasis on inward beauty and not no outward adornment was scriptural. If only I had known and could have quoted:

Some folks in looks take so much pride  
They don't think much on what's inside.  
Well, as for me, I know my face  
Can ne'er be made a thing of grace,  
And so I rather think I'll see  
How I can fix th' inside of me  
So folks 'll say, "He looks like sin,  
But ain't he beautiful within!"

I felt very certain of the *do's and don't's* of Christian living. If I had given in on one point and then another, soon the testimony of a separated Christian life would have been lost.

One morning a woman down the way from us murdered her husband with a hatchet before he woke up. The whole city was horrified. As I came by the place on my way home from school, I saw a large crowd gathered around the building. Later as I was busying myself with regular after-school chores, Mrs. H. said, "Did you hear what happened down the street?"

"Yes, wasn't that terrible?"

"Do you know why she murdered her husband?"

"I suppose she was temporarily insane."

"Yes," replied Mrs. H. "She was insane and it was religion that put her off. A lot of the people who end up at Essondale were religious fanatics to begin with. If you keep going on this religious tangent that's likely where you will end up." That was my object lesson in religion for the day.

They saw to it that I read Sinclair Lewis' book, *Elmer Gantry*. I was to read it with an open mind and see for myself what a lot of racketeers the evangelists were. My knowledge of evangelists was very limited but I could not accept the fact that they were the blackguards my friends painted them. The discussions often upset me. No matter what I said or thought it was only the argument of a teen-ager against the voices of experience. But I had one powerful point in my argument—I had been *converted in the country!* Suppose all the evangelists were wrong: God was not wrong. I had been saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### WEARY BUT NOT WAVERING

The unfavorable atmosphere and separation from fellowship with believers was taking its toll on my spiritual life. There was no inward vigour even though I was sticking in cold principle to what I believed. I would read a scripture verse, quickly offer a silent prayer and run off to school. I always asked God to keep His hand upon my life that His will might be carried out.

The girl's counsellor at Lord Byng High School had taken an interest in me. She talked with me about life at the University. She believed that I would re-

ceive bursaries and scholarships to see me through. My appetite for education was keener than ever. My vision of preaching the gospel in country school houses had given place to a more dazzling picture of a young career woman with an excellent position and a high salary.

After I had finished my first year of university, I received a bursary to go to the Vancouver Normal School (Teacher's College) for one year. Never was a gift received with less gratitude. I told my guardian that I would work or do anything she asked me to do, if only she would let me go to the university. I wanted to reject the bursary to the Normal School. In spite of the intervention of the girl's counsellor on my behalf, my guardian insisted that I go to the Normal School.

At the Normal School I met a number of born-again Christians. Mary Beaton, a student at the University of British Columbia, sponsored an Inter-School Christian Fellowship group in the school. We won several to the Lord that year. Many others with Christian experiences were encouraged to stand true to their convictions.

Not far from the Normal School was the Holiness Movement church where the Reverend Stonehouse was pastoring. His assistant at the time was a young woman named Joyce Free. The pastor's home was a hospitality centre for a great many young people, who were in Vancouver either studying or in the armed forces. At a loss to know what to do with their spare time, they found the parsonage a real haven.

Joyce Free and I became good friends. On Sat-

urday afternoons, we went on short excursions to Capilano Canyon, Stanley Park or to some other beauty spot. Vancouver has one of the most beautiful harbours in the world. The city has a waterfront of ninety miles and is the gateway to the Orient for all of Canada. The Lions, mighty twin crags that rise to more than six thousand feet above the water, are guardians of the harbour. Within easy walking distance for all the city dwellers are lofty mountains that challenge the sportsman.

Joyce's church conducted an open air service in downtown Vancouver every Saturday night. The pastor and several others from the church would stand in a circle around a little folding organ, sing gospel songs and give brief Bible messages to passers-by. Since the service was conducted in a rough section of the city, most of the listeners were in no hurry. Some were too much under the influence of liquor to hurry, others had no place to hurry to.

At first I stood on the sidewalk looking on while the Christians presented the gospel from the circle. But it was all wrong. Had I not been saved? My place was in the circle. I knew my guardian would not tolerate it but now that I was at the street service it did not help matters for me to stand as an onlooker. I might as well participate and show whose side I was on.

We did not plan it so, but it worked out that every Saturday night after a pleasant afternoon together, Joyce and I were present at the street service. She played the organ so she had to be there. The first thing I knew, I was singing lustily with the group and

giving my testimony to the crowd. It came as natural to me as breathing. After all, I had been *converted in the country*.

ON THE CARPET

One day my guardian called me to her office. I tried to guess why she wanted to see me. Either she was going to give me money for new clothes, commend me for doing well in school or reprimand me for doing something she did not like.

She wasted no time in getting to the point. I was hardly in the door and seated when she addressed a question to me and then continued talking without waiting for my answer.

"What is this I hear about you, down there on the street corner spouting like a soap box orator? Do you think you need a university education to go down and talk to the drunks? Is that what you think I am educating you for?"

She made it sound low and vulgar. I appeared to be the most ungrateful wretch alive.

She said, "You have had wonderful opportunities and I have seen to it that you have had everything you needed. I promised you all the education you could absorb and now I find you using it down on the street corner with vulgar people. With all I have done for you, I asked only one thing of you and that one thing you would not do. I did not ask you to give up religion. I only asked that you follow after a faith that would be more in keeping with intelligence and culture."

She continued, "I hear that you do well in your



psychology studies. I suggest that you try a little introspection. Look into your own mind and examine your mental and emotional processes. Find out what makes you think and act as you do. When your academic record is excellent and your social adjustments are good, why do you have to spoil it all by insisting on going to some mission hall? Why can't you worship God in a mighty church where, as the organ peals out its anthem, you walk down the carpeted aisle, kneel and pray, then quietly arise and go? Nobody knows you came and nobody knows you went. But you have worshipped your God. (She made it sound so dignified and wonderful.) But you have to go to a little church where they pump your hand at the door and say, 'God bless you, we are so glad to have you. Will you sing a solo today?' Is it because you have to be the big toad in the puddle?" There was a sting in her remarks.

#### NOT DOWN—BUT OUT

Once more I tried to explain that I did not mean to be ungrateful or unco-operative. I had been *converted in the country* and I could not go back on that experience. If it had not been for my decision to serve Christ, I would have had no opportunities at all. My guardian did not agree, "You have the wrong perspective. Your religion was a help to you in the beginning but now you should use it as a steppingstone to better things. It helped you then but it is hindering you now."

But I knew in my heart there were no better things.

Then she made her final statement, "You are through! I have done all I am going to do. You can get out and earn your own living at the first opportunity."

With all sincerity I expressed my gratitude for all she had done for me and told her that I was sorry I had not pleased her.

Feeling somewhat like the little orphan girl back in the country I turned and left her office. Step by step I made my way down the great stone stairway, praying fervently and urgently as I went, "Please, God, shall I go back and apologize? Shall I tell my guardian I am sorry and that I will try and be more broad-minded? Maybe I could take the occasional cigarette and the occasional cocktail and go to the good shows once in a while. Please, God, if I am just being stubborn and narrow-minded, let me know. I'll go back and tell her that I am sorry." If ever I needed an answer, I needed it then.

I was down the stairs and on my way to the streetcar stop. God had not given me an answer. I heard no voice and felt no unusual impression. But I remembered a young people's service that I had been in where I had stood with my hand raised, singing, "Take the whole world but give me Jesus. I'll not turn back. I'll not turn back."

I had my answer!

Now my step was more firm. To myself I said, "Alright Gerard, you sang it. Go ahead and prove that you meant it."