

So Long! Good Town

Girls and boys were in school together at Winchester on an equality and they could hardly fail to get pretty well acquainted with each other, but they were not supposed to pair off and spend hours together while in school, not even on Sundays and holidays, and the rule seemed to be fairly well enforced, and students with good reputation were seldom criticized on account of friendship with the opposite sex.

But the day that students went home was not treated as a school day. The days in early June were long and usually beautiful there and everyone seemed to be free to say good bye and get away for home in his or her own way. The train for places like Huntland left rather late in the forenoon and there was some time to spare. There was little money left in pockets best known to this scribe. In fact there was the painful necessity of speaking to Mr. Clark a day or two before school closed. (And the deficit was paid in September before money was used for anything else).

In spite of relative impecuniosity (only a few cents were needed for railway ticket) and there was still some left in these pockets. I knew there were four or five miles of fairly good road down toward Belvidere. A girl who lived in Winchester would probably not be too busy the next day after school closed, and she lived only about a few minutes' walk from my boarding house and was a chum of the younger girl at said boarding house.

There was no long-standing agreement about the future between us and it was mainly that for about a year before this day her behavior at school had been what seemed to be about number one among

all the girls, and I had little idea of when I should see her again as I had already got it into my head to go to the University of Alabama in the fall.

At any rate a horse and buggy was soon hired and old Bay was trotting down the road to within sight of Belvidere, one dollar's worth. About the only important agreement was for an exchange of letters now and then.

More later along this line.

A Hot Saturday in July.

My father had had at least twenty years of experience of boys and girls coming home from school just at the beginning of summer, and he was thoughtful not to send people into the fields too suddenly. There was a shot gun in the house and he suggested that since it was the season when the wild mulberries were ripe and there was no closed season on squirrels, I might go up the hill and kill us a squirrel. I did: one of the few I ever killed.

Bun had the crop almost made and he and I were soon in the mountain cutting cedar. If anyone does not know that an Alabama cedar rough can be a hot place, he hasn't tried it on a hot day in July.

We hadn't been at it many days till there was a Saturday noon when we had just come out of the mountain and had not had time to dry off or change our clothes—and there were two men—strangers—at the front gate on horse back. I found that the older one, the spokesman, was Mr. Newt Green from Francisco, Alabama.

"Are you George Bouldin?" said Mr. Green. "Yes, sir, that is my name." And I looked down at my wet cotton shirt. Mr. Green, also, seemed to see my shirt and trousers wet with sweat. "You have been recommended to us as a teacher." And he told me that they had just heard that the man who was to begin teaching their school the following Monday had found that he could not come for another eight or nine weeks, and they were looking for a substitute to start the school off.

At the head of Larkin's Creek there is Larkin's Cove, a rather large community about half in Alabama and half in Tennessee and they had built a new school-house sitting astride the state line and this was to be the first time to have school in the new building. When I went to the new place I found a short piece of broad poplar plank, nicely planed and on it my name with as fine a recommendation as I have received in my life. It was addressed to Mr. Newt Green, Trustee, and signed by Emmons Hudson, a former teacher who was visiting and found they needed a teacher at once.

Mr. Green seemed gradually to recover from his first encounter with such a young man so wet with sweat.

"Will you be there Monday morning, and not flicker?"

Yes, I said I would be there.

And Bun promised to take me on Sunday afternoon and bring my mount back home.

Sunday afternoon we went. I had to carry on horse back everything I would need in eight or nine weeks, clothing, books etc.

I found as good a boarding place as could be found anywhere:- With Mr. and Mrs. Benton Green.

School began Monday morning at 8:00. Close to one hundred students from about 6 to 18—something like eight full grades if it were graded. A good attendance of parents and friends was on hand to see the new school-house broken in.

With so many students and classes it took from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to satisfy one's conscience to a degree. But what a school, what a community and what an experience. In some ways the experience of a life-time. But just nine weeks. It took me nearly to September 28, my 21st birthday. And Mr. Green said I didn't "flicker." It saw me over from childhood to manhood!

Mr. John Clark was ready to take over his school and I borrowed a horse to take me home and back again, for I had planned to take the train at Huntland and go by way of Winchester to Scottsboro on the way to the University at Tuscaloosa.

On The Old East Porch.

I guess it was Friday afternoon and I had ridden horseback the ten miles back home. But it may have been Saturday or possibly Sunday. For I had had time to take in the situation. Bunyan was gone to Scottsboro to school. My father was 74 and getting feeble. Mother was approaching 60. I must have had around \$50 from my weeks of teaching. Father had given me some money, I don't remember how much. His last two will be away from home in school this year. My 21st birthday will be past in a very few days and Bun will be 17 in December. I guess the horse was saddled and I was ready to go. As I went out on the East porch to say good bye to mother it hit me right where I lived—This is the first time in 47 years that my parents will start a winter all alone with the

home and farm. My mother shed no tears—I shed enough for both of us. Father's hearing was not good, but wherever he was, he knew what was happening. I saw him coming out of the family room. He had visited the old clock on the mantel, which was usually visited by no one but him. He had taken another ten-dollar bill out of the old purse. He came out with it in his hand and reached it out to me. He must have heard me say to my mother "I can't go." He said "take this, go on. You might get sick. We are used to it."

So I had to take the extra \$10, and I had to go on to school.

Somehow, somewhere, in spite of a few headaches and a good deal of hesitation, I had come to the conclusion that I should go to the university, get a diploma, and then study law. I learned later that Virgil had planned that he and I should be partners—he with an office in Scottsboro and I with an office in Birmingham.

Anyway, I was on my way. I returned the borrowed horse to Mr. Bill Green, and went by Winchester and handed Mr. Clark the money I owed him. He was his same friendly self, but he didn't suggest that I change my plans and stay with him. But when I saw Miss Ela, the only person I saw besides Mr. Clark, she said "We were just hoping that we could graduate you some of these days." (Wonderful folks).

I spent one night at Birmingham, and the next night arrived by train at Tuscaloosa. I went straight to the home of the president of the University Dr. John W. Abercrombie. He welcomed me, Mrs. Abercrombie gave me a big red apple, and I was soon in bed, ready to enter the University the next day.

University, Ala. Sept.- Oct. 1902

The university in 1902 had about three hundred students, including a few girls, about a dozen teachers and mainly the buildings were fairly old, some boasting holes in the brick walls made by gunfire in the Civil war. The Medical School was in Mobile and the Law School was no doubt the main graduate school on the campus.

After my application was accepted I immediately began to meet the professors and arrange my courses of study. I wanted to be counted as a junior and sought to manage to get a B.A. degree in two years. The president told me that the teachers were sympathetic and he believed it could be done.

My entrance was a few days late and the dormitory rooms seemed to be pretty well filled. I was assigned to one of the rooms commonly reserved for the Trustees. Since those rooms had been closed for sometime and the water had not been in use, I made the mistake of drinking some of the water and it made me sick for a day or two. But soon I was moved to a regular dormitory and was given as a roommate an experienced student whose name was Craighead. He helped me a good deal in getting fitted in to university life.

I plunged right into the classes studying Latin (Dr. Saffold), English (Mr. Foster), French (Mr. Forney), Chemistry (Mr. Persons), and German (a German man) and it looked like I had found what I wanted. There was still military training and my new gray uniform was so attractive that I was tempted to wear it too much.

(By that means the old students could quickly spot a new boy). I quickly learned to wear civilian clothes except for military drill.

I soon, for some reason, decided to give up Chemistry and stick to the languages. When I went to the chemistry teacher about it he insisted that I was making a mistake, he was sure my talent lay along that line and that if I would finish along that line, he could quickly get me a good job, with a good salary, with the Tennessee Coal and Iron Co. I appreciated his encouraging remarks, but I stuck to my plan to specialize in the languages.

Sometime in the week there was a meeting of a debating society and I joined. There was a Y.M.C.A. meeting which I also joined and attended the meetings. When the secretary would read the minutes of the Y.M.C.A. meetings they would always begin the same way "prayer by Chapman." That was the beginning of my acquaintance with James H. Chapman whom now I have known for 59 years and hope to know for the rest of the time. (Alabama papers please copy!)

The First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa

The First Baptist Church at Tuscaloosa was a relatively old-fashioned church. The building was brick and large and well-located. It was not surrounded by educational units. Its preacher was taken seriously and so was his preaching.

The first Sunday morning that I was a student of the University of Alabama the students went in droves to the First Baptist Church. There was Sunday School of course and I remember the song leader very well and the way he led the songs, especially "Faith is the Victory." He was a middle aged citizen of Tuscaloosa, no doubt.

But the service at 11:00 o'clock was still the main service.

And I listened for the pastor, Dr. L.O. Dawson to read his text at the beginning of his sermon.

The text was Mt. 9:37; The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest.

Doctor Dawson didn't do many things he might have been expected to do. He talked well, and loud enough for the large audience to understand every word. But he was recommending to the young men of his congregation a life work. He didn't talk as if he thought that was the only work in the world that needed doing. He talked about the work he was trying to do and he gave it a high rating.

He mentioned some of the hardships the minister might expect to encounter. He set it forth as an important work in a world where such work is needed badly.

I thought I had come there to get ready to study law, and then probably to study law there. But this was not the first time that what Dr. Dawson was saying had crossed my mind.

I went back to the university and after the noon meal was over. I went to my room and fell on my bed and thought seriously and tried to pray.

When Monday came I took the first opportunity to go ^{to} the book store and buy me a Bible. Not an expensive Bible, but one that was to be my very own. Time was not heavy on my hands, for I had to study my daily lessons, but I wanted to read my Bible, and waited for every chance to open the Bible.

Of course I was waiting for another opportunity to hear Dr. Dawson, and the next Sunday morning was at Church on time. I don't know what I expected to hear. But the time when the text was to be read came on. I had no inkling of what the sermon was to be about, but I was listening. The pastor opened his Bible "The harvest is plenteous, but-----

I suppose this was the second sermon on two Sundays in succession that were given from this pulpit by this pastor. It was another good sermon on that vital theme. Not a repeating of last Sunday's sermon, but more of the same kind.

I went back to the dormitory. I spoke to no one about it. Why didn't I? I don't know. But it was more serious; not less.

I did my daily lessons quite seriously. I read the Bible in the time there was to spare.

The third Sunday came. The same text! The same kind of sermon! I don't know what the sermon was about the fourth Sunday. I wasn't there. I had to do something about it.

"I counseled not with flesh and blood." Gal. 1:16

This is what Paul said about his behavior when there was a crisis with him. I don't remember to have recalled Paul's words but they come to me as I write this. But there was this difference. When my card was accepted at the University I turned over to the proper official about all the money I had, in payment for board and other charges.

I went to the president and told my story to date and asked him if there was any way to get back some of the money I had paid in. I remember with gratitude his attitude and his gracious words to this day 8-3-61.

He mentioned chapman and suggested that to finish the course I had started at the university would fit in all right with my newly chosen life work. But when we talked further he seemed to see my situation very well and got most of my money returned to me.

When I met Dr. Abercrombie many years later at the First Baptist Church of Montgomery all these things came clearly to my mind.

I went by way of Scottsboro and Hollywood back to the old home, but I told no one on the way what I was up to. I think I had written my parents about the change in my plans. I recall no word of criticism from any member of my family, and the sympathy of all of them has been an unfailing source of strength to me through the years.

I wanted to get back to Freedom, my home church. And it happened that I reached home just at the beginning of November. Most of the country Churches were still on one-fourth time. That is, the pastor came once a month and preached on Saturday morning and Sunday morning. I was just in time for the Saturday morning meeting. Brother J.R. Lamb was pastor and I told him privately before the meeting began what was my business that day: To ask the church into which I had been received about seven years earlier, and baptized by pastor J.A. Eaves, to grant me license to preach the Gospel. Brother Lamb heard me very sympathetically and promised to put the matter before the church. I went into the meeting house and took a seat on the same bench with my cousin Jim Hall.

In due course Pastor Lamb announced a hymn and after the hymn called me to offer prayer. As I kneeled before my seat and offered my first prayer in my old home church the Saturday congregation suppressed their surprise and joined very quietly in the service.

When the pastor presented my request and asked if the church would grant me a license to preach the Gospel they very promptly voted to license me. They also voted to ask me to preach at Freedom every fourth Sunday morning each month.

It had already been announced that the Beech Grove choir would sing at Freedom that Sunday afternoon. Since it was in that community that I had taught that summer it proved a very happy reunion. Mr. George Irwin, a Presbyterian layman who was very active in Sunday School work at Beech Grove (another name for Francisco, Ala.) was with the choir that Sunday afternoon and when he heard what had happened on Saturday, he took the lead in planning to have me preach my first sermon at Beech Grove Baptist Church the following Sunday, the second Sunday in November 1902. Selah.