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Elder John Leland was born in 1754 at Grafton, Massachusetts. During his sixty-seven years as a Baptist minister he was faithful in contending for the old doctrine and order of the church and in seeking religious liberty for all. In Leland-Madison park near Orange, Virginia, there is a monument with this inscription: "Courageous leader of the Baptist doctrine, ardent advocate of the principles of democracy, vindicator of separation of church and state. Near this spot in 1788, Elder John Leland and James Madison, the Father of the American Constitution, held a significant interview which resulted in the adoption of the Constitution by Virginia. Then Madison, a member of Congress from Orange, presented the First Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing religious liberty, free speech and free press. This satisfied Leland and his Baptist followers."

Elder Leland traveled many miles to preach the gospel without any promise of support. He preached from four to fourteen times each week during his ministry. He had many interesting experiences as he labored in the gospel vineyard but possibly the best known is the one which follows:

During the latter part of his life, Mr. Leland traveled much over the country on preaching tours, on foot. On one occasion, he had been warmly solicited, in writing, by a widow to visit the part of old Virginia in which she lived and preach, telling him to set the time, and her house was at his service, both as a place of abode, and also a place to hold meetings. Mr. Leland replied to her by setting a day that he would preach at her residence at 10 o'clock a.m. The lady was a wealthy planter, in Appomattox Valley.

She regarded herself as one of the most pious and exemplary persons to be found anywhere. She had been reared in the highest circles of life, and knew nothing about poverty, nor had ever associated with laboring classes. She was at this time about thirty years of age, and had been a widow two years, but knew nothing of the privations commonly attending the life of a widowed mother. She took much pains to appear pious, and her chief object in inviting Mr. Leland to preach at her house was that she might make a display of her wealth,



and thus have the applause of all her associates; not only to show her wealth, but her piety as well; so she went to a great trouble and expense preparing for the meeting. The appointment had spread far and near, pressing solicitations had been sent to numerous friends to attend the meeting; no expense or pains had been spared, not only to have the best and finest of everything, but to have everything in the best style.

On the evening preceding the meeting several carriages had already arrived to be in good time and enjoy the hospitality of the hostess. About sunset, Mr. Leland came up to the mansion on foot. The day was quite warm and dusty when he made his appearance. The walk had caused a free perspiration which ran down his cheeks making roads in the dust which had settled on his face during his day's walk. He walked up to the door of the large stone mansion and his rap was answered by a black servant, of whom he inquired for the landlady; the servant ran down the broad carpeted hall to a door, from which proceeded the sound of talking and laughing. In a very short time, a lady very richly attired, made her appearance, walking briskly and lightly toward the door, where Mr. Leland was standing. He had a fair view of her person, and at once saw in her physiognomy and deportment something of her leading traits of character.

His intention had been to introduce himself, but before he had time to speak, or before she was near enough for him to address her, she spoke in rather a harsh tone: "Old man, what do you want here?"

Mr. Leland, in a very soft and unassuming tone, said, "Please excuse me, Madam; I do not wish to beg for money, but I am very tired from a long walk, and called to know if you would show me the kindness to allow me to stay under your roof during the night."

Viewing him hastily from head to foot, she very positively answered: "No, I have company now, and tomorrow, the Rev. Mr. Leland is to preach at my house; so I can't take in poor stragglers."

"Well," said Mr. Leland, "I am too much fatigued to travel farther tonight. Will you allow me to stay in one of those cabins?" pointing to a row of Negro houses just outside the mansion yard.

After a moment or two of reflection, she said, "Yes, you may stay there with the Negroes, if you want to."

He bowed a very polite thank you, and turned toward the row of huts. He proceeded to the farthest one from the mansion before he found anyone to whom he could speak, to ask permission to stay, but came at last to the smallest, but neatest of all the huts, where he found seated at the door an old Negress, who was fanning herself with the wing of a fowl. He spoke to her very gently:

"Good evening Aunty."

His greeting was answered with, "Good evening, Mars'r."

"Well, Aunty," said he, "I have come to ask a very uncommon favor of you."

"Bless de Lawd, Mars'r, what can that be fo'? Please God I'se got nuffin to give you!"

"I am very tired from walking all day. I called at the house of your mistress, but she has no room for me in that great house. I am much too fatigued to go further, and I have come to see if you can allow me to share in your house."

"Bless de Lawd, Mars'r, I got no 'commodation for anyone; but 'fore a fellow mortal shall stay out do's, I let 'em stay in my cabin, sho' ef dey can put up wif my plain hut. Uncle Ben be in drekley; den he can keep you comp'ny while I fixes you sump'n to eat, for you looks as though you had not had a morsel for a long time," at the same time pointing to a three-legged stool, saying, "Set down dar and rest yose'f, for yo' looks so worn out."

Mr. Leland took the seat as directed, saying at the same time, "I am sorry that I am compelled to put you to so much trouble, as I have no money to pay you."

"Please God, Mars'r, Aunt Dilsey never charges anyone yit for sich 'commodations is I could give 'em, for God knows it's poor enuff at de best. You say, Mars'r you call on Missus at de house dar, and she can't take you in; well, you must 'scuse her, for she's looking for a mighty heap o' comp'ny to-morrow, so Missus is mighty busy fixin' for 'em. But here's Uncle Ben," she continued, as an old gray-headed Negro came around the corner of the cabin, muttering to himself about the carelessness of some of the other Negroes.

This old couple, Uncle Ben and Aunt Dilsey, as they were familiarly called by all who knew them, both black and white, were an old couple who from age had for a long time lived in a small, but snug cabin at the far end of the row of huts occu-



pied by the younger and more active slaves. Although Uncle Ben was not required to do any labor, he voluntarily took a kind of supervision over the farm stock, etc. When he saw Mr. Leland, he stopped short and gave him a scrutinizing look, when Aunt Dilsey spoke, saying: "Uncle Ben, don't stare your eyes out at a stranger; dis ol' gent'man was out travelin' and come to stay at our cabin, kase Missus cain't let him stay dar, as she's got a heap o' comp'ny now."

"Well," said Uncle Ben, "We'se commanded dat if a stranger comes along, we's got to take him in an' give him sech as we have to set befo' him."

While Aunt Dilsey was preparing supper, Mr. Leland learned much about the lady of the mansion from Uncle Ben. He learned, with other things, they were a very religious family, but the hostess had been reared in the city of Richmond and had imbibed all the fashionable ideas of religion, with but very little of its true principles, and none of its humility. Soon after Mr. Leland had finished a good, but coarse supper, he told his host that he was much fatigued from a long day's walk, and would wish to retire for the night, and that he felt like he wished to return thanks to his Creator for the blessings of the day, and invoke His protection through the night; that if it would not annoy them, he would retire to some place out of doors.

"Bless God" said both of the old folks at the same time, "We allers likes prayin' in our house, and neber goes to bed 'thout one of us tries to pray."

Mr. Leland then took an old well-worn Bible out of his bundle, and read in a very solemn tone, the 102nd Psalm. During the reading the two old black people often said in a low voice, "Amen, bless de Lawd." When the Psalm was ended, Mr. Leland fell upon his knees and poured out his feeling in such an outburst of reverential eloquence as was seldom ever equalled, and never surpassed by mortal lips. His host and hostess were so affected by his reading and prayer that they could do nor say any more than to fix their eyes on their guest as though they felt that he was something more than mortal man. He retired to a clean pallet in one corner of the cabin, where he fell asleep. When morning came, he was up early; Aunt Dilsey soon had him a good repast, after which he seated himself to read, telling his hostess that he felt much too tired to travel, and if she was willing, he



would rest there until afternoon anyway, and then if he felt better, he would go on his way.

Aunt Dilsey said, "Yes, Mars'r, stay jist as long as you want to; we be glad to have you stay wif us a fortnight, if you can put up wif our fare."

Mr. Leland seated himself under a shady tree in the cabin yard, with his Bible, waiting to see what the finality would be.

About nine o'clock everything was in a bustle at the stone mansion; all the servants were called in to dress in their best. Carriages began to arrive by the dozen, until the hall and every part of the large and elegant building was crowded to overflowing, but to their dismay, no preacher made his appearance, for the last carriage that came in sight had been scanned to get a glimpse of the minister. No one in the large congregation ever had seen him. So every one was full of anxious expectation, supposing that when he would be drawn by two or four fine horses, driven by a servant in livery.

Ten o'clock past, half past ten, eleven o'clock was announced by the clock on the wall, and no minister.

The company had by this time become restless, and were about to disperse, when Aunt Dilsey went to her mistress and said: "Bless de Lawd, Missus, why don't you git dat ol' man who stayed in our cabin last night to come here to de do' and pray 'fore de folks all go home; he prayed in our cabin last night, and dis mo'ning; afore God, in all my born days, I neber heard sich prayin' in all my life, an as de preacher's not come, if you'll let him pray, I'll go right now an' fetch him down."

The lady consulted with some of the company, the matter was talked of among the congregation, when it was agreed to have the old straggler, as they called him, to come and pray before the congregation broke up. Aunt Dilsey went to where Mr. Leland was sitting, and said, "Mars'r, de folks all dispirited 'bout de preacher not comin': He am not come, and dey want you to go down and pray for 'em 'fore dey all breaks up. Mars'r, I wants you to pray lak you did last night."

Mr. Leland walked down to the front door, and standing on the steps, repeated a short hymn from memory, sang, and then engaged in prayer. By the time the prayer was ended, all eyes were fixed on him in amazement. He then remarked that as there seemed to have been a disappointment, that if it would not be assuming too much, he would talk to them for a few minutes; and as a foundation, or starting point he

would read a short passage from the word of truth which they would find by reference to the thirteenth chapter and second verse of Hebrews: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." When he had spoken for twenty or thirty minutes, the hostess, who had refused him the hospitality of her home the evening before, became so deeply affected that she ran and prostrated herself at the feet of Mr. Leland, and had he allowed her to do so, would have washed his feet with her tears. It is said that she was so overcome and affected that from that time forward she was a changed woman.