

THE W. C. TAYLOR LETTERS

Letter No. 37

Box 1504, Louisville, Ky.

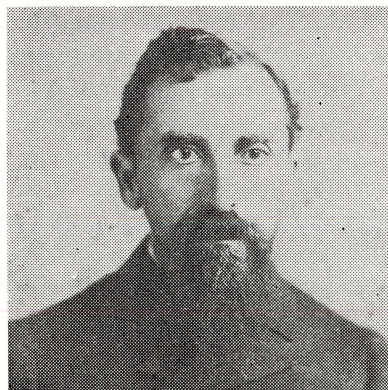
MY BABYHOOD AND MY BIBLE

This is chapter 2 of my autobiography. Chapter 3 has already been published in my home-town paper, **THE NEWS-DEMOCRAT**, of Russellville, Ky. Many of you have read it. Please do not write to me or the paper for a copy, in case you did not read it, for neither I nor the editors have any, **except in the files**. I had never thought of writing my life story till I attended the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis. There I heard the moving and Christ-honoring narrative of the life of one of our missionaries, and it suddenly came to me that there are also many things in connection with my life's history which reveal the glory of my Savior. Then, and therefore, I resolved to write this study of my life as a whole, bearing principally on such facts. Most of these chapters will never be published, even in this form, except for the typed copies given to my children and one or two others who have requested them. The first chapter was my W. C. Taylor Letter 30, about "MY BATTLING, MISSIONARY-MINDED FOREBEARS", of four generations of Baptist preachers in Kentucky. This second chapter is told to show the place the Bible can have in a baby's life and the after years.

The greatest Christian I ever knew was my mother. Her parents and my father's parents lived on farms near Beaver Dam, Ky. About one hundred years ago my father was a student in Bethel College. He had aimed to get there earlier, having raised a crop of corn to pay his initial expenses. His father, thrice married, said to him: "William, I need that corn for

your brothers and sisters." "Take it," he said and postponed his education. When he had exhausted the money he brought to Russellville, he earned his way by shining the shoes of President ~~John O.~~ ^{Jacob Ward Rust} Rust every morning and by cultivating his garden for him. He developed tuberculosis and one day he left the college spitting blood and came back to Ohio County to die. My mother was a country school teacher. She loved him, married him, took him to her farm home and nursed him back to health and added a score of blessed years to his wonderful ministry. There their first child was born and named for Dr. Boyce, the founder of our Seminary. Papa had blessed pastorates in country churches, then in Rockfield and Auburn and then in Mayfield, where I was born. We three sons and our mother visited all our old homes, during one of my furloughs from Brazil; and I saw the beautiful home in Rockfield, and also the old tenant house on a farm, where Fred was born. The doors were swinging wide open and the hogs running in and out, at the time of our visit. It had been a storehouse for corn in later years.

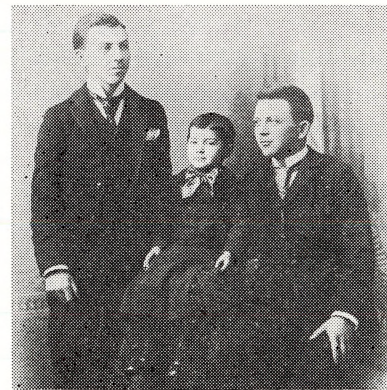
My father was wonderfully LOVED. I have been told that no church he ever served accepted his resignation. My mother did not want to leave Rockfield when he was called to Auburn. He laughingly packed their few belongings in the spring wagon and drove it up to the door and she reluctantly crawled in. When he was called to Mayfield, the Auburn people said: "Mrs. Taylor, you just say you won't go, and then he CAN'T leave." "Oh! No," she said.



William Carey Taylor, Sr.



Frances Adaline Taylor



The Taylor Sons —
Boyce, Fred and W.C.

"I tried that once and it didn't work. Now I know better. I'm afraid if I stood in the way of his going where God calls him, then God would take me out of the way!" So to Mayfield they went, and there I was born, a year and a half before his death.

My older brother was sixteen years older than I, and I do not remember his ever living in our home. His homecomings for Christmas were always a great joy to us all. The next son, Fred—Alfred Asher was his real name—was fourteen years older than I. To me he was perfection. I loved him as I never loved God, so far as affection is love. (My love for God is far more than mere affection.) I still do not recall ever seeing or hearing him do or say anything that I should classify as sin. He never struck me or spoke an unkind word to me. He taught in our Southern High Schools for sixty years. He was my ideal, my father and my Santa Claus. One Christmas Eve, I ran on him with the things that were to go in my stocking, in his arms. I remember the shock of that moment, when it dawned on me there is no Santa Claus! My stocking was always filled and hung before the open grate Christmas Eve. In the top was one orange, the orange of the year for me, except those we ate in the Christmas day desert of ambrosia. I ate ALL of my yearly orange but the seed. I roasted even the peeling before the flames and ate it every bit. Fred was the most remarkable disciplinarian I have ever known or known of. He controlled by his voice, firm but reasonable. For years he worked in Russellville. Every morning he ran me a race to the corner, keeping just out of my reach as I followed him with screams of laughter. He was only stern if I "sassed" my mother or disobeyed her. Then he made me feel in a moment as if I were a criminal! Blessed saint!

In those days tuberculosis was treated by travel. So I went all over Florida and the coast towns of the Gulf of Mexico, as wealthy deacon W. J. Slayden took us to resort after resort, to see if my father could get well. He got better. We visited this great spirit, in Washington, the same wealthy laymen who later did so much for Mars Hill College, on our way to Brazil as missionaries. My father made one last trip, this time to Texas. He came home and next day nailed up the loose pallings around his garden. But that night a cold snap came on us, and he choked to death next morning, from his cough. This was in Russellville. Foreseeing death, he had moved there and instructed my mother to educate the three boys in Bethel College. That she did, as well as other members of her family and his, in Bethel or Logan College.

After my father's death, my mother wanted to die, too, so she could be with him. But she carried on her responsibility, as he had counseled. She read her Bible through every year. The last time I ever saw her she had read it through some 90 times and the New Testament through 120 times. When I asked her

how many times she expected to read it through, she said: "Never again. I'm not a-going to waste my time any more on those old genealogies." That was my feeling since childhood. I had rather study the part that means more. She taught a Sunday School class till she was aged, then worked in the Home Department for years, in the First Church of Murray.

My brother Fred corrected her doctrine she was teaching me once, without a word of discussion. She took the Sermon on the Mount literally, as much as one can. So she taught me not to resist evil. She taught me herself till I was twelve and a half years old. Then my brother Fred taught in the public school in Russellville and she sent me to him. As I did not "resist evil," I was pecked on by every kid that found that out. As soon as my brother heard of it, he came home and said to me: "If I hear again that you let another boy thrash you, when I come home I'll give you a worse thrashing than he did." I was delighted. My mother exclaimed: "Oh! No, Fred! Here I am teaching him to obey the Bible and you teaching him to disobey it!" He made no reply and she accepted the decision. I RESISTED EVIL next day. There was a boy in school, Charley Griffith, who could easily whip any boy in town, in a fair fight. His mother also was a great Bible student and he understood my problem. So when I began to "resist evil," he would meet me at the edge of the school grounds and walk with me into the building. I had no more trouble. My favorite Scripture, personally, has always been: "The Lord preserveth the simple." He "resists evil," too.

Russellville was an aristocratic town and the "best families" did not patronize the public school. I attended three private schools, one taught in the house in the ~~De~~traffenried yard—maybe once slave quarters, but then used for a school, one in Dr. Ryland's home and one by Prof. Fuqua. Preachers' children got free schooling and free doctoring, so my mother was invited to send me to all these schools. Then I entered Bethel College, which then had a prep department. I began the study of Greek under Ryland, developing my Latin under Fuqua. Later on, my blessed Sunday School teacher, Dr. Bryan, took a stand for the public school and lined up our church people in a change of attitude. I just had three Sunday School teachers till I graduated from College. As a baby I went to the Infant Class of Mrs. Nimrod Long, rather stern wife of the great banker, Treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention. I was scared of her. Then Mrs. J. Guthrie Coke taught me. I simply idolized her. Then Dr. Bryan became a wise counselor, as he taught the lessons for years to us boys.

In this picture, I wear a dress, a red velvet dress of which I was very proud. Baby boys then wore dresses. I recall clearly the first time I ever put on pants. I remember stopping and looking down at myself, wondering how I would stand the pinching and teasing my mother's boarders would give me when they came home from Bethel College that day. At

this time I knew by heart a vast part of the Bible. My mother taught me to love it. She memorized it and I did, too. I knew by heart Genesis I, the Ten Commandments and many other verses in the Pentateuch and the Historical Books. I knew by heart Psalms 1, 2, 19, 22, 23, 24, 42, 46, 51, 84, 90, 103, 110, 121, and many other verses in the Poetic Books of the Bible. I also knew by heart Isaiah 6, 40, 52, 53, 55, 61, and many verses from the Prophets. I knew in the Gospels Matthew 5, 6, 7, some of the parables, John 1, 3, 14, 15, 16, 17 and in Acts, chapter 1 and many verses, and Chapters 1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 13, of Romans. In Paul's other Epistles I knew I Cor. 13 and much, if not all, of 15; II Cor. 5, Galatians 6, and Ephesians 2, 6. I also knew Hebrews 11, 12, James 1, I John 1, 3, II John and Revelation 1, 4 and 22. These and multitudes of isolated verses were my treasury of Scripture.

I have always waked up at four o'clock in the morning. On the mission field, I worked from 4 till noon, then took a nap after dinner, and worked another eight hour day, winding up by preaching somewhere nearly every night. There is so much to do on a mission field, especially if you are anywhere near the pioneer days. I taught the Greek New Testament, having prepared and published a Greek Grammar and a Greek Dictionary in Portuguese and other textbooks, edited a weekly paper, much of which I wrote, was President or Dean of the Seminary, helped found the two W.M.U. Training Schools in North Brazil and South Brazil, and taught in both, my wife being the first principal of our first one and having taken the girls into our own home, to begin with. Besides this, I was pastor in rapid succession of many churches. I would help found a church, maybe take the pastorate and keep it till we could train a man for it or use one being then trained. When a proper substitute could take my place, I yielded the responsibility to him and passed on to other work to be done.

But, of course, in childhood I was awake early, with nothing to do. I well remember the great walnut bed in which I slept with my mother the cold winter nights of my babyhood. We burned nut coal. About nine or ten o'clock we covered the fire, as it died down, with nut coal and fine coal dust. Then we smothered it all over with ashes. About four the next morning that mass of coals would crack and break open at the top and a thin white flame would shoot up. With that burst of light in the room I was wide awake and would then insist: "Mama, 'es say Skiptur verses." She was so sleepy, but she never refused. And we took time about then to see which could outlast the other in saying verses.

My brother Fred, home over a holiday, brought his cot in, to sleep by the fire one night. He told us afterward how he awoke in the early morning before day and heard my piping voice, well over in the New Testament then, quote: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds."

He turned over and went to sleep, leaving us going on in our race.

I do not recall my mother's ever obliging me to memorize any Scripture. She loved it, and her love proved contagious in my soul.

In all these years, my mother was the incarnation of my father's spirit. He lived on in her. And she saw to it that this was true, especially in our home-life. She taught me the meaning of our Christian life. Early she took me in her lap and showed me that ten dimes made a dollar. Separating one dime, she said: "Now this is the tithe, a tenth for God. And we will get along a lot better giving God his tenth for his work and living on nine tenths, than we would if we selfishly spent everything on ourselves." Of course, we spend all the tenths as stewards. Thus she made the spirit of all our worship and religion live in my understanding. On Sundays we sat right behind Dr. Ryland, three or four seats from the front, in the center of the church. And I peeped through my fingers as he would often lead in prayer. As he talked to God, it seemed to me that he was laughing as he spoke the great words in which he voiced his praise and petitions. I did not understand, but the language of worship became part of me this early. His prayers were very much like the Psalms I memorized.

I felt like this was MY church, the same as I felt like our house was MY home. One night there was a delay in the entrance of the bride and groom, in a wedding ceremony. At a loss to understand, I called out to Pastor Bow, whom I loved for his visits in our home: "Budder Bow, it's five time o'clock. Time to begin." He used to tell me about it. Oh! How much it means to you to feel like your church is your home. I meet people now who want Baptist churches to become Episcopal or Catholic churches, a place of silence where people can go in and use the building for their private devotions. The place for private devotions is at home, not in churches. To regard them as sacred places that give validity to formal prayers and other performances is mere superstition. God is not in those stones, that wood, that glass or those curtains or musical instruments any more than in any other material things. **HE IS IN HIS PEOPLE.** Give your reverence to the **PEOPLE OF GOD** who meet there. And let them, when the hour of public worship has not begun, or is over, have the blessed fellowship to which they are entitled as the redeemed of the Lord. They don't see each other anywhere else but in their church. Don't change it into a lonesome superstition!

What were the practical effects in life of all this memorized Scripture? Several. For one thing, it came back to me as life was lived. My mother kept boarders and had a girl to help her. I do not remember this, but she told me in after years. I came on the girl stealing ham. She had a great handful of slices. In my solemn way I said to her: "The Bible

says, "Thou shalt not steal." I did not tell on her. I never told on anybody. We boys had a saying:

Tell tale tit!
Your tongue shall be slit,
And all the dogs
In the town
Shall have a little bit.

But she was so impressed that she took the ham to my mother and told her herself.

Another effect was a lifelong sense of eternity. The great old bell, at Bethel College, when it rang, seemed to be saying to me, even as a small child: "Where will you spend eternity?" I went to the mourners bench from early boyhood, though only converted when a junior in college. I ever lived under the aegis of eternity.

The Bible is in my subconsciousness. I never quote it. I use it considerably in preaching, but I always mark it beforehand and read it as I use it. The use of many versions has killed my familiarity with any one of them. I can with difficulty quote John 3:16—maybe! But Scriptures fly at me from within. Just so, in singing, I rarely use a hymnbook. The entire hymnbook of old hymns comes back to me as we sing them. The music brings them to consciousness, though I cannot quote any hymn, deliberately.

The effect of this inner voice of Scripture produced in me early, and on and on, a deep conviction for sin, meditation along the way of my busy life as I helped my mother earn our living, and a deepening sense of a call to preach. I wanted to teach, could not bear the thought of giving my life to preaching. But the call kept ringing within. Finally, when a college boy, I wrote in my Bible, in English words but spelled out in Greek letters: "Oh, God! If you will convince other people that I am called to preach, and they tell me so, without my ever indicating it to them in any way, then I will go." That gave me

relief. I had not learned that you do not make bargains with God, but obey him. But God had respect to my ignorance and met my condition. When I was teaching at Bardstown, I was called to a full time pastorate, at Arlington, Ky., without ever having preached a sermon. When the first letter came about it, I showed it to the jolly girl in my Latin class whom I later went back and married. Always spiritual, behind her jolly ways, she said to me earnestly: "Professor Taylor, such things as these one takes in consideration very seriously." And I did. I consulted my beloved Russellville pastor, Dr. W. C. James, and he wrote simply: "If God calls you, go now." And I went. They could not hear me over half way to the back of the house when I preached my first sermon. But a noble people were patient with their boy preacher and made him what he is.

We used to have a fifth Saturday and Sunday ministers' meeting in West Kentucky, with a perennial question box. I directed this written query to Calvin M. Thompson, great pastor in Paducah then and later editor of THE WESTERN RECORDER: "Can a man be called to preach before he is saved?" His answer came quickly: "I do not recall a time, even in my earliest life, when I did not **know** that I was predestined to preach the gospel." My mother gave me this heritage of Scripture. It lay subconsciously in all my inner being for life. And in the hour that God willed, it always came to the surface and aided his will to be done. In heaven she knows what a blessed thing she did for me. And she now sees her three sons, one a pastor for some forty years, one a missionary for forty-one years, and the best of the three a deacon in the First Church, Memphis, for years. Presently we three sons shall join her and together fall before the feet of him who sits on the throne of this universe, whom, not having seen, we love. Yes. They have seen him. I will.

* Mistake - Jacob Ward Rust was then President of Bethel College. John O. Rust was pastor in Bardstown much later. My wife remembers him there when she was a child

W. C. TAYLOR,
41 Years Southern
Baptist Missionary

W. C. T.