

Give Him His chance; and He will give you assurance that is unshakable! "If any man hear My voice and open the door I will come in to him!" "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out!"

### THE GRAND OLD MAN OF MISSISSIPPI.

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"Whar' de old elder?" This was the way in which a prominent minister of Jackson, Miss., Rev. Dr. J. B. Hutton, was addressed by a Pullman car porter. A year or more before this Dr. Hutton and Dr. C. W. Grafton, a country preacher of Union Church, had traveled together from Mississippi to Columbia, S. C. They had not been on the train very long before the country preacher knew the name and the essential details about every passenger on the train. As the day was drawing to a close he said to those who were seated around him, "About this time down at Union Church we read a chapter in the Book and have a prayer. Don't you want to join us in it?" One fellow from Philadelphia said, "No, I am not interested". The old country preacher beckoned to him and said, "Young man, you come sit here by me". Dr. Grafton's dominant personality and his long practice in the training of youth were such that he commanded obedience even of this cynic. He put his arm around his shoulder and said, "Now, son, you were telling me about that wife and those children up in your home in Philadelphia. We are going to have a prayer for them." The porter strolled in while the evening worship was in process and was so impressed, the next time he saw Dr. Hutton, which was a long time afterwards, his first question was, "Whar' de old elder"?

Information for this article has been obtained from Dr. Grafton, his son and grandson, three generations of Presbyterian preachers.

Last summer I was invited by a young minister just beginning his pastorate in the country to make him a visit. After spending two days with him I said, "Now, I have been doing what you asked me to do for you. I want you to do something for me, and that is to drive me to Union Church to visit Dr. C. W. Grafton." We had to go nearly one hundred miles out of our way, but it was many times worth it.

It was on Saturday, and we found the old preacher in his study. He was hard at work, as thoroughly engrossed in his sermon as a man of thirty. He gave us the outline and presented to us the message which was completely absorbing his attention. I said, "Dr. Grafton, it is remarkable how alert you have kept your mind, for you tell me that you are eighty-four years of age". He got up from his seat and walked across the room to a book-case, from which he took a long scroll. He said, "I take mental gymnastics and this is one of them". He unrolled the scroll and on it were the pictures of all the Confederate generals. He said, "I look at these faces and I must be able to call the name of every one of them. When I meet a man I must be able to call his name."

His grandson, who is the third generation of preachers in the family, says of his grandfather, "His study is in the old manse in which he lived during the first part of his ministry. He now lives in another building which he put up to be used as a boarding house for the school. In the manse study he has the quiet and the companionship of the cows and the birds, the grass and the flowers. There are his books, accumulated for the last sixty years. Here are shelves of sermons of six decades, written out in outline, and treatises arranged in chronological sequence. Here is the desk by the open window with the open Bible given him by a beloved sister. Out of the window he sees the grass, the trees, the fence, the woods, the cows, the insects. Back of the study is a well-worn path, up and down which the old scholar paces as he evens out the rough parts of his sermon. Here, too, around the workshop of the pastor, are the rooms full of the tenderest memories. In that corner his wife whispered her last word; in this one a son just come to manhood uttered his parting farewell and went to his reward;

here he knelt down with another son, as he was about to go as a missionary to China, and gave him the benediction which the young man carried in his heart through more than a quarter of a century of service in that far-off land. They are these: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusted in Thee."

We left the old manse study for the home in which the preacher lives. His pets were two black kittens. He said he called one Pot and the other Kettle. I said, "Dr. Grafton, which is Pot and which is Kettle"? He said, "I don't know".

We went from the home to the church; an ordinary little country church, standing back from the highway in the solitude of the open country among a beautiful grove of trees. I went into the pulpit and said, "Dr. Grafton, this has been your throne for fifty-eight years. Who can calculate the value of the influence which has emanated from your messages here or estimate the helpfulness of the transformed lives which have gone out of this place to every quarter of our land?" It is interesting to note his answer. He did not say, "I thank you", or "That is true", or "I give God the glory". He simply said, "Please lead us in prayer".

Before the days of electricity, even before the days of the coal oil lamp, when cook-stoves were unknown and matches had not come into use, C. W. Grafton was born in Madison county, Miss., the second of six children, and his birthday was December 21, 1846, making him eighty-four years of age. He is still the active and acceptable minister of his first pastorate, where he came to preach fifty-eight years ago. He has not used spectacles for more than twenty years and his hearing is unimpaired; of the original thirty-two teeth, all are in their places and still doing service.

#### *Soldier.*

The great Civil War found him a boy in his early teens; first his father, then his brother were called out to the defense of the Confederacy. All the care of the home fell upon the

embryo preacher and his younger brother, who managed to keep the farm going.

One of his most vivid memories is that of the siege of Vicksburg. In May, 1863, he was hoeing corn in Madison county and in the distance heard the thunder of Grant's guns as they pounded away upon the defenses of the city. In the fall of that year, when he was not yet seventeen, he answered the last despairing call of the Confederacy and was sent to join the command of General Joe Johnston. He was slight in stature and became one of General Forrest's troopers, assigned to bearing dispatches.

In his first action with the invading troops a charge was ordered against the enemy, who held their fire until the gray-jackets were swarming over a rail fence. As the lad reached the topmost rail a storm of bullets swept over the crest. Down he went, the grim attackers swept on to victory with ranks thinned out. At the first roll call there was no answer to the name of C. W. Grafton. A cousin stepped over to the lad's father and said he saw him fall as he crossed the fence. But the father's grief was quickly changed to joy by the arrival of his son, dishevelled and soiled but without a scratch. According to his version, the top rail had turned and spilled him on his head and when he came to himself the battle was over.

#### *Scholar.*

Pine knots abounded and threw out the cheeriest light ever known. By such a light young Grafton and his brother studied the classics. He prepared himself for college and graduated from the University of Mississippi in the class of '88, the first regular class after the Civil War, and of that class he is the only living survivor. He made a record that has been the despair of those who have come after him.

After he graduated at the University he taught school for a short time at Sardis, Miss. After this he pursued his ministerial training for three years at Columbia Theological Seminary, where he graduated with distinction. Even before graduation he had begun his ministry at Union Church, which has now lasted for over fifty-eight years.

*Education.*

In the middle and late '80s the education situation in Mississippi reached its lowest depth of hopelessness. The Union Church was far out in the country, removed from the highways of men. There was little to attract good teachers and the schools were taught by wanderers who came and vanished after a few months of inadequate pay. The church is located twenty-five miles from Brookhaven on the Illinois Central Railroad and twenty-one miles from Vaiden on the Mississippi Valley Railroad, and until the automobile came there was no way of access except by horses, buggies and carriages. Dr. Grafton, in support of the location, says, "It is truly out of the way and far off in the country, but the birds have been singing here to admiring listeners for one hundred years, and the flowers and grasses have been blooming and growing and the pure spring water has been flowing just below the church building and the great forest trees have been lifting up their branches and have been waving in the winds, and nature has carried on her great processes in silence and in dignity".

He loves the spot, but it has been difficult to get strangers to live there as his co-laborers. In speaking of the difficulty to secure teachers, Dr. Grafton says, "On one occasion a young man was elected to be teacher of our school at Union Church. He left the railroad and came out twenty-two miles, where he spent the night. While there we supposed he pondered over the long road, and next morning he turned his horses around and went straight back and we have never seen him since. Later on a young lady was chosen to be our music teacher and she came out with high hopes, but when she got settled she, too, thought of the long distance and hope died out in her young heart, and after two or three days she, too, left us and we have seen her no more."

These discouragements led Dr. Grafton to undertake the school himself for the benefit of a large number of children just reaching school age. In ten years there passed under his tutelage four hundred boys and girls. His graduates were eagerly sought after and through them came the hardest temp-

tations of his whole life, for large institutions made constant and sustained efforts to secure him as president. All of these he steadfastly refused, announcing that when he had finished with the present generation of boys and girls he would give his whole time to the pastorate. He was offered the presidency of the two largest institutions in the State. He was unanimously elected to the head of one of them, as well as to a college outside of Mississippi.

One of his great ambitions was to specialize in theology. In his prime there came a call to become professor of theology in his *Alma Mater*. It was the temptation of his life. He declined all these flattering offers of position, honor, trust and large salaries to remain as a country preacher on a salary of around \$600 a year. He says, "I was called to be the pastor of Union Church and I have never been convinced that the Lord wanted me anywhere else". No doubt he had the spirit of John Frederic Oberlin, who was for fifty-three years a country preacher in the Vosges Mountains in Alsatia. When repeated calls came to him offering large emoluments and positions of distinction, he always said, "My place is where I can be of the greatest service at the least recompense". Dr. Grafton used to say to his students in the school, "There are three kinds of work—the work of a slave, done through the fear of punishment; the work of an hireling, for the money that is in it; and the work of a child, done for the love of father and mother". He urged them to work for the noblest motive—the love of God. This is the motive that seemed to have actuated him in remaining at Union Church.

As a result of his labors, not only the school buildings were erected, but two boarding houses, one for boys and one for girls, all without a dollar of appropriation from State or county or one dollar from the millionaires of the land or one dollar from endowment. "One patron would bring boards, one lumber, one brick, one would do hauling," says Dr. Grafton, "and these buildings all stand there now to show for themselves, representing the time, the soul, the heart, the love of the country preacher." It is pleasing to note that on the foundation of this work as early as 1912 there was established a

fine agricultural school. Three large commodious buildings were erected on a tract of land within calling distance of the manse and the church, where large numbers of young people gather from year to year. Dr. Grafton's students have gone out to serve society in all walks of life. One of them is a major-general in the United States Army, others are ministers, doctors, missionaries, educators, professional men, leaders in the world of business, and large numbers have given their lives to work in the schools. In 1926, on his eightieth birthday, he was presented with a birthday Christmas tree by his former school children—many of them living in other States. On the tree there were in dollar bills \$505. It was a thrilling moment in the life of this veteran teacher and preacher.

#### *Pastor.*

He has passed through much sorrow. In the early part of his pastorate he lived through the Reconstruction period. For a while he and all his people were under the domination of the negroes, just out of slavery. Then there came a period of great financial depression. Cotton went down to four or five cents a pound. Every one heard of mortgages, liens and deeds of trust all over the land. Many of the farms were given up to the creditors. Then about 1906 the boll weevil struck the country, which brought absolute ruin to the cotton industry. In spite of all the adversities which have come to this community, Dr. Grafton says, "The church and school were great conservators and the old country church slowly and surely is recuperating and girding itself we hope for better and richer days to come. During all these periods the old church has been faithful in answering the calls of benevolences."

And sorrows came, too, into the very inner shrine of the home. The wife of his youth and the mother of his children was taken. There were two graves of little children; in addition to those, one of a beautiful girl of twenty and another of a promising youth in the prime of young manhood. He had to be father and mother to the children after the death of his wife.

Dr. Grafton, having been a child of sorrow, became a minister of comfort. His own triumphant personal faith that had known no breaking made his life a benediction to these country people for over fifty-eight years. He has frequently been called far beyond the bounds of his congregation to minister in the house of sorrow, in the homes of other denominations. Sometimes they have said to him, "We have nothing at all against our own preacher, but you have known and taught and loved our children and we wanted you with us in the time of our grief".

Dr. Grafton has known the bankrupt of his own fortunes and has weathered the storms with unfaltering faith in the great eternal. He has, therefore, been able to communicate his confidence and strength for the uplift of those who have faltered about him. When discouragements and privations have come, like the prophets of old, he has been able to lift in exultant voice, "The dawn cometh", and hundreds of weaker members of the great human family have been encouraged and vitalized.

Dr. Grafton says that he has buried a whole generation and the congregation upon which he now looks Sabbath after Sabbath is composed largely of the grandchildren of the men and women who were the members of his parish in the beginning of his ministry. As he walks around and sees the bright faces of his young people he is led every now and then to ask if they remember their grandparents. The boys and girls will go away and say, "The preacher knows more about my grandparents than I know myself". Then he says with a twinkle in his eye and a kindly smile, "If you knew what sort of grandparents you had, you would feel inspired to rally up and do better than you are doing".

It is not strange that Dr. Grafton is known as the "grand old man of Mississippi", and that in 1916 he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., the highest honor in the gift of his peers.