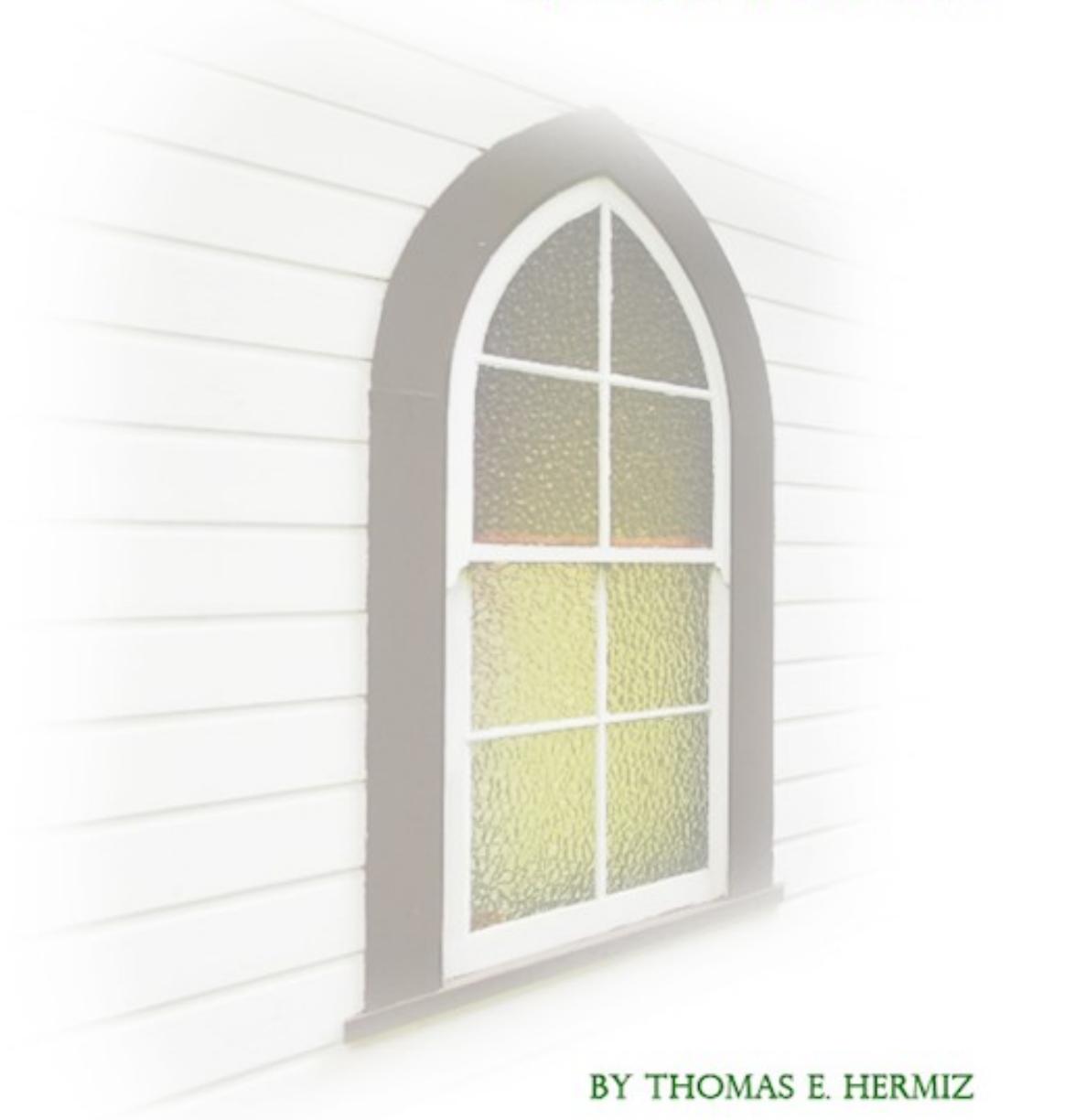

THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF THOMAS E. HERMIZ



BY THOMAS E. HERMIZ

**THE
TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS
OF
THOMAS E. HERMIZ**



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Author: Thomas E. Hermiz

Holiness Legacy Ministries

PO Box 861033 Shawnee, KS 66286

www.HolinessLegacy.com | Info@HolinessLegacy.com

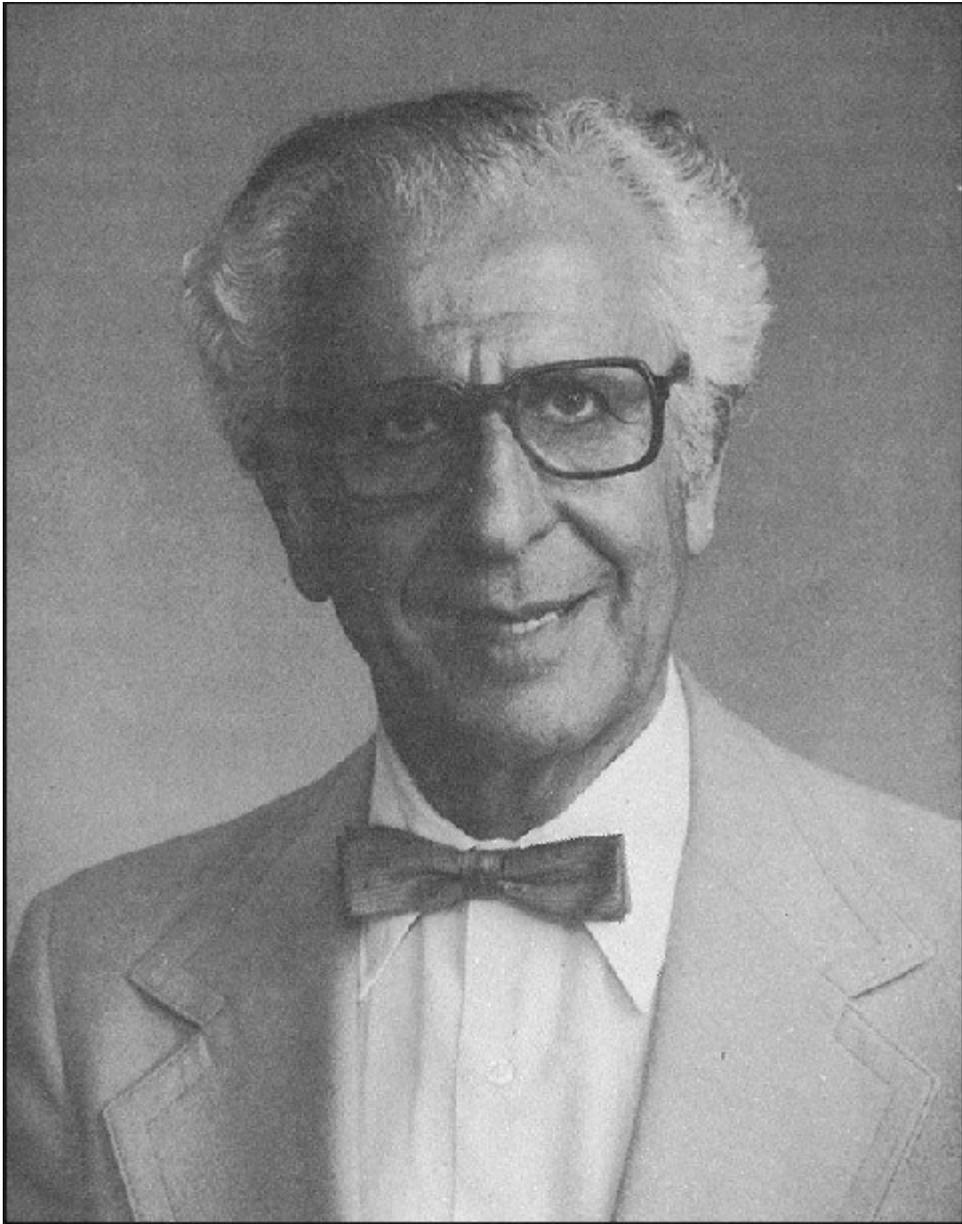
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To my wife and six children who have added much to my joys and triumphs this book is lovingly dedicated.

Thomas E. Hermiz



Thomas E. Hermiz

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Preface

On September 3, 1934, I wrote for the first time, the story of my experiences in a little booklet entitled, "Mohammedan Persecution of Christians." This was done while I was finishing high school in Lancaster, Ohio. Nineteen years later, on August 20, 1953, while pastoring in Endicott, New York, this booklet was revised and some additions were made. From time to time this latter was reissued by the Circleville Bible College of Circleville, Ohio, which at that time held the rights to it. As the final copies of the last reissue were running out, it became apparent that it should be either reissued, rewritten or discontinued.

A number of things have impelled me to feel that the booklet should not be reissued, but completely rewritten. These reasons are as follows:

1) In the summer of 1957, four years after the 1953 revision, I made a tour of Europe and the Middle East, including Syria, Lebanon and the Holy Land. During this tour I was able to see some of my relatives again, in Syria and Lebanon, and had some incidents clarified for me. These clarifications are in this book.

2) I have been urged by many of my friends to rewrite my story.

3) My son who is in the ministry, Dr. Thomas H. Hermiz, has been pleased to refer often to the various incidents of my life, using them as illustrations. Since he has developed such a wide ministry and has received many requests for such a book with these narratives, it seemed only logical to rewrite and publish this book.

This book and its predecessors have been written to demonstrate the keeping power of God's love amid persecutions, trials and tests of life. In the Song of Solomon 8:7 we read, "Many waters cannot quench love, Nor will rivers overflow it; If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, It would be utterly despised" (NASB). So with the purpose of showing that this love will work when given a chance, and encouraging the believer in Christ to hold on amid persecution and trial, this little book is written. There is also a hope that the sinner will be won to the Christ whom we love and serve.

THOMAS E. HERMIZ
WASHINGTON C. H., OHIO

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that the sorrows and disappointments of life seldom leave us just the same as they found us. They will either leave us bitter and resentful or more sensitive and compassionate. They will serve as a means to make us stronger or they will literally leave our lives in shambles.

It is at this point that our faith in Jesus Christ can make the difference. Like a master carpenter, He is working to put our lives together better and stronger than they were before.

In order to do this, He sometimes must allow us to go through great adversity. The greatest of saints has frequently endured the fierce storms of life. The result being that their character is not like writing in the sand but like words that have been chiseled in granite. With their faith resting on the promises of God, they become steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

I can say unequivocally and without fear of contradiction that the author of this book, my father, Rev. Thomas E. Hermiz is such a man. The traumatic experiences of his childhood have served to make him a strong and compassionate man. His spiritual life and moral character are above reproach. His simple faith in God and his love for all people have been the strengths of his pastoral ministry spanning more than four decades.

During my boyhood years, I heard my father tell his life story scores of times. I never grew weary of hearing it. In recent years it has been my privilege to use parts of his story as illustrations in my own sermons. Literally hundreds of my listeners have requested the reprinting of this book so they could have the complete story. I am grateful that in his seventieth year, he has been able to complete this revised and updated copy of his life story.

It is a rare honor when a son has the opportunity of writing an introduction for his father. It gives me great pleasure to do so. He stands tall among the great men that I have been privileged to know. He is living proof that the love of God shed abroad in our hearts can turn bitterness and hatred into love and compassion.

DR. THOMAS H. HERMIZ
PRESIDENT WORLD GOSPEL MISSION

Background

Around 1800 my foreparents emigrated from the city of Mosul in Iraq to the little city of Midyat in southern Turkey. The city of Mosul is situated on the site of old Nineveh, capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire. Actually all of this section of geography composed a large portion of old Mesopotamia—the land between the two rivers (the Tigris and the Euphrates). Northern Mesopotamia is now a part of southern Turkey and southern Mesopotamia is Iraq. So when my forefathers moved from Mosul to Midyat they were still in Mesopotamia but were now in another country, namely, Turkey. Incidentally, Mosul is the second largest city in Iraq, after Bagdad.

The Turkish nation is made up of several ethnic groups beside the Turks. They are Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs, and a sprinkling of others. All of these ethnic groups speak a distinct language of their own. After the first World War and the Young Turk Revolution, the Turkish government made it mandatory that the Turkish language be learned by all of its peoples, irrespective of the ethnic background. Turkey also changed from the use of Arabic characters to the use of the Latin characters in its written language.



Emmanuel, Tirzah, and infant Thomas 1912

A Godly Heritage

Around 1880 American missionaries in southeastern Turkey commenced operating in a section known as Jebel Tur, the center of which was the city of Midyat. This part of Turkey was at one time a part of old Mesopotamia. Midyat is some miles north of the Euphrates River.

For a long time these missionaries met with very little success due to the fact that Turkey, whose prevailing religion is Moslem, ruled the country. Under this rule, if any Moslem should be converted to Christianity, or any other religion, and depart from the religion of Islam, he faced certain persecution, and even possible death.

Eventually these missionaries directed their efforts toward the conversion of Jews, and toward the adherents of Christian denominations, who they felt had departed from the true faith. In Midyat the other Christian denomination was known as Jacobite. For a long time they met with very little success due to the prejudice of the people who were incited by their priests.

During the summer the missionaries gave themselves to conducting open air services in the market place, and by this method gained a wider hearing for the gospel among all the people; but even this was not without some opposition or hindrance.

The story that has been told of my grandfather's conversion goes somewhat like this: His Jacobite parents warned him never to stand around and listen to these missionaries in the event he passed by at the time they would be conducting their open air services for, if he did, he would become polluted in the sight of God, but that he should place his fingers in his ears every time he came within hearing distance of these open air services. Although he was a young man in his twenties, with a wife and a couple of children, he obeyed his parents, and whenever he came within hearing distance of the open air service, he would be seen with his fingers in his ears.

On one occasion he was detained across the street from the open air service, but he obediently placed his fingers in his ears to close out any sound of music or speaking. He was close by the open air meat market also. Back in those days, and perhaps even now, the meat was not encased under glass, as in this country, but was hung on pegs on an outside wall of some building. The customer would choose the piece he desired and, after some haggling over the price, he would purchase it. Since it was summertime, there were plenty of flies to light on the meat, and also on those nearby. Since grandfather had his fingers in his ears, he found it necessary every once in a while to take his finger out and drive the flies away. In fact, they seemed to make regular excursions between the meat and his nose and face. One of the times he got his fingers out of his ears long enough to hear the missionary quote the text: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith." Whether the missionary sized up what the young man was doing or not, and spoke the text for his benefit, or just spoke the text to get the attention of all, the Spirit of God applied the text to his heart, and it gripped him. He decided to hear the missionary through whether he became polluted or not. As he heard the story of God's redeeming love through Christ, and saw how he had been deceived throughout his young life by false teaching, he listened more intently. As the missionary continued to talk, and read out of the Scriptures, which had been closed to him previously, he became a convert on the spot, and soon was telling others of his new-found faith.

His conversion did not set well with either of his parents, or with his wife and children. Eventually his wife and children were reconciled to him but, to my knowledge, his father and mother never were reconciled to him, but remained aloof from him.

Grandfather became a devout follower of Christ, and in turn, the Lord prospered him. In the following 20 years he became one of the most influential Christians in the city of Midyat, as well as one of the most prosperous. It became a passion with him to win others to Christ and to the Christian faith. He operated several stores, and each time he opened a store he would take time to speak to his employees about the way of salvation. His businesses became avenues by which he

won converts to Christ. He became a thorough Bible student and used his Bible knowledge as a means of converting others.

Grandfather's conversion seemed to be almost the turning point in the success of the Congregational Mission in that area. Many converts were now made and a strong Protestant community began to form in the city of Midyat. The church that was built around that time still stands today as a testimony to the strength of the faith of those early converts. These Christians, including grandfather, lived to see some awful persecutions at the hands of Moslems, especially the Turks. It is said that in 1895 one of the most severe massacres took place in which more than 500,000 Christian men, women and children throughout the Middle East were massacred. The Armenians were the chief sufferers. Their houses were often plundered, burned to the ground, or simply confiscated, and when they were through, there was little left but death, desolation and destruction. There was no end to the extent of their cruelties.

Little babies had their heads dashed against the wall, or were bayoneted and waved above their heads for a sport. Women were dragged by the hair on the streets. Blood flowed everywhere; but Christianity was not blotted out, for, in spite of all these atrocities, the majority of Christians held fast to their witness for Christ. They loved and served God faithfully. They even prepared the minds of their children to be loyal to Christ, knowing that death was for a moment and then they would be with their Lord in heaven.

Grandfather lived to see most of his large family of children married. I believe that only his youngest son, Solomon, remained unmarried at the time of his death. It seems that grandfather had a premonition as to the approximate time of his death. He called his family about him, at a time when he had been seriously ill for some time. He had them sing hymns and gospel songs for some time. Then, like a prophet out of the Old Testament, he covered himself with a quilt upon his bed, and without warning passed away to be with the Lord.

The Massacre and the Aftermath

My father, who had been named Emmanuel, was perhaps the most adventurous of Grandfather's children. Having grown up amid this atmosphere of the persecutions of Christians, and witnessing some terrible atrocities, he grew up hating all Moslems in general, and the Turks in particular. While grandfather lived, he restrained him, but once his father passed away, he began to work actively against the Moslems in every way that he could. He was able to get some other young fellows to operate with him. This had the result of making an outlaw of him and soon the Turkish authorities were hunting him down. His friends warned him that he should now leave the country, or he soon would be captured and killed. This he refused to do for a while since, by this time, he was married, and I had come into the world, and was now a little less than a year old. Also, mother was expecting another child. He could not very well take us with him, since the methods of travel in those days were very primitive. You could only travel on foot, or ride a horse, mule, or donkey. Under these circumstances he felt that he could not leave us. However, after being nearly caught once or twice, he decided to listen to his friends' advice and leave Turkey. Some months after he left, my sister was born.

My sister and I were named after our paternal grandparents, Thomas (Thoma in Assyrian) and Bessie.

At first father went to Brazil, where he and several relatives and friends stayed for a couple of years. Then they emigrated to the United States, perhaps around 1915, after World War I broke out in Europe. He and two of my uncles settled in the neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. These uncles' names were Jacob and Alexander. They hoped to send for their families eventually.

After arriving in the United States father received word that all of us had been massacred by the Moslems. Of course this was not entirely true, but it further embittered my father against the Moslems. So when the United States entered the war in 1917, he was among the first aliens to enlist in the American Army. It will be remembered that in World War I Turkey fought on the side of Germany and the Central Powers. This was sufficient inducement for him to enlist as an American soldier. As a result of his enlistment he was given naturalization and became an American. (When later I came to the U.S. as a minor I was automatically an American citizen through my father's naturalization.)

As indicated, the report father received was only partly true. When father left Turkey, I was only about a year old. This probably was some time in 1912. When later my sister was born, he never got to see her, so when the events I am about to relate took place she was about two and a half years old, and I was about three and a half years old. The time is definitely uncertain, except that these events took place during World WAR I and in the Fall of 1915. The Christian community of Midyat received information from some friendly Turkish soldiers that the Kurds, who are also Moslems, were planning to attack our city, and several other communities, and massacre the Christian population.

This report caused great confusion. Many of the Christians fled to other towns where they might fare better. Others remained to defend themselves and the city against invaders. Those who remained gathered in central points in order to meet the attack of the Kurds. My family gathered with many others in a large row of houses that were elevated in position, with walls around them. Since the houses were separated only by common walls (partitions), holes were made in these walls so that we could go from one house to the other without going outside. Here we gathered for safety and for defense. Mother put several dresses on each of us children so we might have sufficient clothing, especially in case we became separated. The older people knew that Moslems would plunder and take all the clothes and other goods for their own families so, at least, this was one way of saving some of our clothes.

We stayed in this place of defense all night, and as long as I was awake, I could hear the firing of guns, and the battle cries from both sides, for under the cover of darkness the Kurds made their attack and some of our Christian men went out to repulse them. So there was fighting on the streets. The Christians were greatly outnumbered and utterly defeated. Many fled for their lives to other places; many were killed.

When morning came, I found myself in a room in the last house in the row with approximately seventy others, mainly women and children, but also with a few very young men. We were all trying to keep as still as possible, since we could hear the voices of the Kurds out in the courtyard, as they had broken through our defensive walls, after having overcome our men. A little boy began to cry for his mother, but was immediately hushed. The Kurds may, or may not, have heard him, but in a few minutes they were banging on the door that led to the room. That scene is still vivid in my memory, for I was sitting near the door with mother, maternal grandmother, uncle Abraham, and sister. Mother (whose name was Tirzah—pronounced Tarzo in Assyrian) had three brothers, and this one was about 15 years old at this time. I don't know where the other two were, but I had occasion to remember this one.

When the door was opened for the Kurds, they began immediately to search the few young men to see if they had any guns or ammunition upon them. Finding some ammunition upon the person of my uncle, they took it from him and slapped his face. Before they took him away from us, he stooped down and planted a kiss on my cheek (I will always remember and cherish that). The next time I saw Uncle Abraham, he was lying dead in his own blood after a knife had been plunged into him—a martyr for Christ.

Being so young, I naturally missed a lot of details and much that I may not remember at all. I think I remember most of what came under my observation and with which I had to do, if for no other reason than the fact that, for some years later, I never laid my head on a pillow at night, but what I went through, in memory, the entire scene again.

Whenever the Moslems raided a city, it was not only with the purpose of killing the Christians for their faith but also to plunder their possessions. Since, by this time, they had our men on the run or else killed, they knew they had the situation well in hand and began the task of plundering the houses. While they were doing this, some of us got away and hid. Mother, sister, grandmother and I hid in a hay loft. The people of the house were farmers who lived in the city and went out to their fields, as all farmers in those countries do in order to protect each other against marauders, bandits, and other people of aggression, especially during these civil strifes, which have been so frequent in the Middle East. Under the loose hay we remained for some time until one of us sneezed just as some Kurds were passing below us. They called us down and we obeyed. Mother and grandmother were taken out into the open courtyard, leaving sister and me in the hall for some time. When mother and grandmother came back into the hall, blood was streaming from the side of their necks over their dresses. It seemed that someone had just taken a knife and torn flesh from their necks, thus torturing them rather than killing them outright for their faith in Christ. This is the only explanation I can give.

We hardly knew what to do next. Finally we went out into the courtyard, upon which a number of houses fronted. For a while we were alone. Mother and grandmother must have been suffering intensely by this time. I heard them say that they would lie on the ground as if dead, until a time should come when they could make their escape. This they did, while Bessie and I stood side by side looking down at them. What prayers they must have uttered to God for our safety and protection, as they must have known that soon we would be separated from them in one way or another. When one is helpless, it is always best to commit yourself and your loved ones to God!

It seemed that they had scarcely lain down when a Kurd came out of one of the doors leading into the courtyard. Seeing sister and me standing together he came and took me by the wrist, led

me out of the yard and onto the street, leaving sister and the others in the yard. From that day to this I have never seen them.

Before continuing my story I would like to tell what I know, or heard, as to what happened to them and one or two other incidents, of which I was not an eyewitness, but received information from good authority.

It seems that mother and grandmother did make their escape out of the yard. They were later discovered and were offered the opportunity of saving their lives by a man who wanted to marry mother, if she and grandmother would only deny their faith in Christ, at least until the trouble was over; but they refused to do this. They were then taken before the Turkish magistrates in what I will call the Court House of the City. They were put on trial for their faith and when they refused to deny Christ and become Moslems, they were taken out into the courtyard, stood up in front of a wall, while Turkish soldiers shot them down as martyrs for their faith.

Very frequently children were killed, as well as adults, but many times children were taken and adopted by Moslem families, especially those that had no children. They believed this to be meritorious if they brought them up as Moslems. This would go on their account in heaven. With this in view both sister and I were spared. As far as I know, Bessie is still with them if she is still alive, though I do not know where. Uncle Gabriel, Father's oldest brother, thought he knew the village to which the Kurds had taken her. More will be said on this later.

An incident that was reported to me later by several people, but to which I was not a witness is relative to some of the devout men of our church in Midyat. These men, amounting to 50 or 75 in number, had some misgivings about resisting their invaders. They were what we would term conscientious objectors, who felt that taking up arms, even in self-defense, was forbidden by Christ. Yet they felt an obligation to their families. They were in a quandary and so gathered in a secret place to pray and counsel before making a decision. But while they were praying and meditating on this issue they were betrayed. This betrayal took place by some of the men of the other church. They were hoping by this betrayal to get into the good graces of these Moslem Kurds. So these godly men were captured without making a decision. Among the men was an uncle known as Galli Hermiz. He was a leader among the Protestant Christians of our city. When he discovered how they had been betrayed by the Jacobites, he had an opportunity to speak to the leaders of the betrayers. He spoke something like this: "We forgive what you have done, but keep in mind your turn will come next." And his prediction came true.

All of these men were given opportunity to save their lives by giving up their faith in Christ and becoming Moslems.

When they refused, they were marched out of the city in order to be shot. As they were marching they were singing the hymn. "Nearer My God To Thee," translated in their language. They were all shot down as martyrs for their faith with this song on their lips. This shows the marvelous grace that God bestows in the hour of trial to those who put their trust in Him.

I now come back to my own story. Having been led out onto the street, the first thing that met my sight was the body of the little boy who had cried for his mother when we were waiting in silence in the room. It was stripped naked. Whoever killed him evidently desired his clothes for some child at home! One of my cousins later reported that, later in the day, he witnessed the awful scene of children being placed on a pile of wood to which fire was set. It seems that there was an eclipse of the sun at this time, but what was especially remarkable was the fact that no child was heard to cry with pain. I have no other explanation than that God was on the scene and was with them. Besides seeing this child I saw many other bodies of men, women and children scattered on the streets, especially as the Kurd led me through the main thoroughfare of the city and near to what I would call the Court House, where it seems that a major battle had taken place in the night and early morning hours. It was difficult to walk without walking over dead bodies. It was a terrible sight to meet the eyes. Death was present everywhere within the city.

When we arrived on the outskirts of our little city, we entered what seemed like a small army camp, which for the moment seemed deserted, except for one or two soldiers standing guard. A Turkish soldier stopped us. It was the providence of God that we met this soldier. He spoke to the Kurd and then he slapped his face. Evidently he wanted me, so he took me from him. He placed me on a donkey and took me to another town. Even on the highways the naked bodies of Christians could be seen on the roadsides where they had been killed.

The soldier took me to the home of a kindly Kurd, where we stayed all night. I have stated that my mother had put several dresses on me before we left our house. Well, at this place I was left with just one dress; they took the others for their own children. I cried through the night. For the first time I was separated from my mother and everyone that I knew. It was a horrible feeling for a child.

The next morning the soldier started out for another city by the name of Astal. I would guess that Astal was about 8 to 10 miles from my native city of Midyat. Here an aunt of mine lived with her Moslem husband. Aunt Medjida had made some compromises in order to save her life and the lives of her two daughters by a previous marriage. She never actually became a Moslem. For many years I thought that this soldier knew me, because my people were well known in our city. I thought this because he later “took me” to my aunt. However, I know now that it was just the providence of God. In 1957 I made a tour, with some young people, of 15 countries of Europe and the Middle East. I took a side tour to Lebanon and Syria. I had quite a few relatives in a city in northeastern Syria, named Kamishli. One of the cousins whom I met was Miriam, the oldest daughter of Aunt Medjida. I asked Miriam, “How was it that the Turkish soldier brought me to your mother?” She replied, “He didn’t bring you to my mother, but we were standing in the city square when I saw you with this soldier. I took hold of mother and said to her, ‘Mother, Mother, there is cousin Thomas with that soldier.’ She went to the soldier and begged him to let her have you.” All of this shows that God in His wise providence led this soldier to take me to the one place where my aunt lived. Further, He ordered that she would be out with her daughter at the very time that this soldier came into Astal with me. This was more than mere coincidence—it was Divine Providence!

For some reason Aunt Medjida could not keep me herself. There may have been a problem with her Moslem husband, since she already had her own two daughters. She evidently knew a Moslem couple in the same town to whom she could entrust me until such a time as the war and the internal troubles between the Christians and Moslems could quiet down and when, perhaps, my father could be contacted and he could claim me. This couple was Arabic. Their names were Darwish and Fatima Piskali. They were childless and welcomed the opportunity to adopt a child. Living with them also was Majid, Darwish’s youngest brother who, I would judge, was in his upper teens at this time.

My oldest uncle, on my mother’s side, discovering that Aunt Medjida had placed me with a Moslem family was not satisfied to keep me there, so he sent for me and had me brought to Midyat to reside with him. There, realizing it was too dangerous to stay, we moved away in obscurity to another town, where uncle hoped we would be safer. However, we were very short of food, and one day uncle sent me out to beg for something to eat. This was hard for me to do, as I had come from a fairly wealthy family, and had been taught not to even accept food from strangers. I was not a successful beggar, so I must have returned to my uncle empty-handed. I say “must have,” for actually something happened to me, as I don’t remember anything else after standing up in town on my begging expedition. A whole period of time is lost to me, but I must have gotten very sick. The first thing I knew we were back in Midyat in my uncle’s home. Evidently the massacre had ceased. But I was very sick. I have no idea how much time had elapsed from the day I went begging to the morning I awakened in my uncle’s home in Midyat. Everything in between is a blank.

It was a sunny morning, and my uncle decided to take me out in the sun. I believe that he had become afraid that I was too sick for him to take care of and that I might even die on his hands. He saw the wisdom of sending word to Aunt Medjida that if the Moslem family she had entrusted me to would come for me and take care of me they could have me. So on that morning as I lay in the sun, who should come into the courtyard but Fatima riding on a donkey!

Thus I was taken back to Astal to be adopted by Darwish and his wife Fatima. They were kind to me and looked upon me as their son. I am sure they intended to keep me so. I shall always remember them with kindness. Fatima nursed me back to health and strength. They fully adopted me according to Moslem custom. Since they were anxious to bring me up as a Moslem, they changed my name from Thomas to Jamiel, which is a Moslem name. Under their kind and much needed care, I naturally learned to love them and, of course, their religion became mine. They taught me Arabic, and soon it was the only language I could speak. My mother's tongue was Assyrian, since my people all were Assyrian. During my stay with them, which lasted several years, when I saw any of the Christian relatives I would shun them, for fear they would take me. This Moslem family instilled a prejudice in me against Christianity and all Christians.

Adoption into a Moslem Home

During the several years that I lived in this Moslem home, I was taught the ways and habits of these people. These people of Astal were not as devout in their prayer life as we are led to believe. There were many who did not stop at the accustomed times to pray. Five times daily the Muezzin is required to climb the Minaret in order to call the people to prayer. Of course, today many Moslem Muezzins employ modern technology and call people to prayer by way of the Public Address System, thus saving themselves walking all of those circular stairs. In Astal there was a high Minaret. This village was predominantly Moslem, unlike Midyat, which, at that time was predominantly Christian.

Darwish had three brothers; two of these had gone to war, but Majid, the youngest, was only a half-brother, and was at home. I judge he was between 16 and 18 years old. For some time this adopted uncle became a scourge to me, for he made life miserable for me. He probably did not like the fact that I had to sleep with him at night. At night he would pinch me; in the day he would, at times, slap me, when no one was around. I think I know a little of what Paul meant by having a thorn in the flesh. Also, I have sympathy with Isaac when Ishmael, his older brother, made life miserable for him (II Corinthians 12:7 & Galatians 4:28, 29). However, I had respite from this unpleasant situation when, in the summer, he was sent away to a village some 20 miles away. When he returned some months later, he was entirely different. I had no more trouble with him. In fact, next to Fatima, he became the closest one to me, for even Darwish was a rather indifferent fellow, though he was good to me and never abused me.

My adopted mother, Fatima, was quite religious and was usually faithful in keeping prayer periods. She would fast during the month of Ramadan. During this month Moslems fast between sunrise and sunset. I think she was as devout as most of those that I had come to know in that area; yet when she would sit around with the women in the neighborhood she, with the others, could exchange some of the filthiest stories imaginable. The Islamic religion is definitely not a religion of the heart. It will not change the heart, and affects the life very little. It is not a religion that will change a person's moral life. There is possibly one exception to this, and that is that a devout Moslem will not drink alcoholic beverages. A good Moslem is to be a total abstainer. However, I have known a number of them to be tipplers, and some to the point of drunkenness. All these people need the Gospel of Jesus Christ to save them from sin. Of all the religions of the world only Christ deals with personal sin and gives power over sin. What a responsibility we Christians have to evangelize the world!

Moslem boys tend not to have respect for their mothers when they are widowed, especially when they are old enough to resist them. One day a boy was quarreling with his widowed mother right on the street. A number were watching the quarrel, including me. In the quarrel the boy picked up a rock and threw it at his mother. He missed hitting his mother, but unfortunately it did not miss me. It struck the top of my head and left a gash. I will always have the scar. When Fatima was informed of my misfortune she became hysterical. She had a strange way of reacting when she saw blood on me. She would pick up little stones and throw them in my direction, with never the intention of hitting me. In the end she washed my wound and lovingly took care of me.

Moslem boys where we lived in Astal learned the art of war early in life. Boys in each community would team up against boys in other communities and throw stones at each other with slings—such as perhaps David used when he killed Goliath. Every boy seemed to know how to make a sling out of twine, and I was no exception. More than once I went home with a slight head wound from one of these miniature wars, and always Fatima would get hysterical, but always bandaged my wounds. The worst treatment I ever got from her was after I had found a dead chicken. I got a butcher knife and performed an “autopsy” on it (no person will eat an

animal that dies of itself in that part of the world). This operation that I performed on the chicken smeared my hands with blood and when Fatima saw the blood, she gave way to her hysteria by taking me by the heels and dropping me on the ground,—making sure that I didn't get hurt too badly!

In spite of Fatima's hysterical conduct when she saw blood on me, I knew she loved me dearly and often would take me on her lap and shower kisses on me. I thank God that at this time I was loved! I am sure that this love brought some healing to my mind and spirit. No one knows how much loving a child needs after passing through such traumatic experiences as I had had.



The author soon after arrival in the U.S. in 1921 The flag (48 stars)—patriotism Red Cross emblem—since the Red Cross made possible his arrival in the United States

Bound for America

I have already stated the facts of my father's journeyings, culminating with his arrival in the United States. Also I noted that he enlisted in the army when the United States entered the European conflict in 1917. It will be remembered that resident aliens who enlisted in the armed forces were, and are, given the privilege of quick naturalization as American citizens. He was among the very first aliens to enlist. He saw active service with the 26th Yankee Division in France. He was also gassed in the line of service, and never recovered entirely from the effects though he did better than many. When the war was over he returned from France well decorated with medals, which he took good care of in a glass-covered box. He had served valiantly.

Some time after his return he received a letter from my cousin, Benjamin Hermiz, to the effect that I, his son, was still alive, for he had seen me. This greatly excited and overjoyed my father. Soon he was seeking ways to bring me to this country. One of his friends advised him to go to the American Red Cross. He was living at this time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where there was a strong Red Cross chapter. The Red Cross workers must have done a wonderful job, for they finally paved the way for me to be taken away from these Moslems and brought to this country.

I was at play when cousin Benjamin came with some kind of a permit to take me away from Darwish and Fatima. I was not at all happy about leaving; my joy was gone. I wept much, but in spite of all my protests and tears, as well as Fatima's, who poured curses on Benjamin's head, I was taken away. First, we were to go to the city of Mardin, about a day and a half's journey, as caravans traveled in those days. Here was a Congregational missionary school where I was to wait until arrangements could be made for my travel to the United States.

However, a couple of days after arrival in Mardin, Majid, my adopted Moslem uncle, came to the city of Mardin with a caravan. I had liberty to walk in the city, and as I came to the Khan (Inn) I was overjoyed to see Majid. Soon we arranged, between us, for me to escape with him back to Astal. I was to walk to the outskirts of the city and the caravan would pick me up. This took place the next day, and in a little over a day I was back in Astal with Darwish and Fatima. I was very happy to be back.

My happiness was short-lived, for in a month or two some kind of an official came and again took me away from this Moslem home. Again, I wept as did Fatima. It was as if I had been her own real son and had died. In reality I had become her son and she my mother. It was a sad farewell; they had to literally drag me away. As we traveled again toward Mardin I continued to weep until the man slapped me and made me stop.

Two things made it impossible for me to run away to the Moslems again. Majid was very sick when I was taken this second time and it was a month or two before he was well enough to make the journey. Then this time it was not easy for me to leave the school; I didn't have as much liberty to roam around as I had had before. By the time it might have been possible for me to run away, (Through "the grapevine" I understood that Majid had come to get me) I had been under the influence of the Christians in the school, especially cousin Yusuf Shammās. I was weaned away from the religion of Islam, to again embrace Christianity as my religion. Not that I understood or knew much about either one. While this change in me was probably superficial, it satisfied me sufficiently to wait until the time I could start on the long journey to America where I would see my father. I began to look with anticipation toward the event.

This was a fair-sized missionary school operated by the Congregational Church. But, as already indicated at this time, it was serving chiefly as a children's refugee center. Practically all the children in the school now were those belonging to martyred parents—one or both. It had become, for all practical purposes, an orphanage for children of Christian parents. Some of us were happy to have living fathers in America who would eventually make provisions for us to

come there. Among them were my four cousins in the girls' side of the school: Hannah and Fahima (later known as Faye), daughters of Uncle Jacob (their oldest brother, Benjamin, having already left for America, and their youngest brother, Thomas, having died a few weeks previous from over-exposure), Miriam and Bessie, daughters of Uncle Alexander. On the boys' side, besides myself, was Yusuf (Joseph) Shamma, son of my Aunt Romea. All of us had lost our mothers, while Yusuf had also lost his father. Perhaps among all of us, Miriam and Bessie had witnessed the worst times. Years later, in this country, Bessie became entirely unbalanced from the shock of all she had witnessed, and has never recovered. All of these cousins were related to me on my father's side of the family. With the exception of Yusuf, we all eventually came to the United States to live. But while at this school Yusuf became my closest relative and companion. He was several years my elder. He taught me the Lord's Prayer and other things that I certainly needed to learn. In later years Yusuf became the Dean of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon.

I remained in this school for approximately a year, waiting until the groundwork was completed to make it possible to leave the country. I didn't know it until some years later that at this date the Turkish government was not permitting male children to leave the country. So eventually, when the time came for me to leave, I was literally smuggled out of the country. I only remember that it was a long journey traveling in a caravan with mules, donkeys, and horses serving as pack animals and human transportation. It seems as if it took ten days or two weeks. We were on our way to Aleppo in northern Syria. On this journey we needed to cross the Euphrates River. It was at this point that I was smuggled out of Turkey. Since I had no passport, or other official papers, I was put on a boat loaded with animals (horses, mules and donkeys). It was somewhat frightening, but when the crossing was made, we were out of Turkey and in Syria.

After staying in Aleppo four days, I took my first train ride to the city of Beirut, Lebanon. This was a very unpleasant trip, as there were no comforts on the train. But, at least, we made the trip in one day.

In Beirut I was delayed for some months, since there were difficulties in getting a passport for me. All this time I was traveling under the supervision of the Red Cross. Eventually I was placed in the care of an Armenian family who was traveling to the United States. Later my passport came through.

It took some months to travel between Beirut and New York City. By boat we traveled across the Mediterranean to Marseilles in France. Then between Marseilles and a northern port in France we traveled by train, making a number of overnight stops before we arrived at this northern port from which we took an Italian ship across the Atlantic to New York. We arrived on the shores of the New World some time between Christmas of 1920 and New Years of 1921. There we disembarked on Ellis Island on December 31, 1920, after we had been quarantined for about three days aboard ship.

On Ellis Island there were large halls for sleeping quarters, one for men and one for women. They may have had a place for married couples—I do not recollect. That night I slept in one of those large halls with what seemed about two hundred men and boys, all sleeping on double-and triple-deck bunk beds. I slept on a lower bunk. Morning came too soon for me, and when the awakening bell rang I opened my eyes, but decided to get a little more sleep. When I finally awakened, I found myself all alone in this large hall and in semi-darkness. I was frightened. I found my way to a large double door and began pounding on it, crying all the while. Some men opened the door and, seeing me crying, they comforted me, took me to the dining room and gave me a good breakfast. Then they filled my pockets with some English walnuts. No one scolded me for oversleeping! This was my first taste of American gentility and kindness.

My father had evidently been informed of the date of my arrival, for on New Year's Day he arrived on Ellis Island to claim me. This is what happened.

That morning quite a number of names were called out to appear before the customs officials to be processed. The names of the Armenian family that I was traveling with, and of myself, were called out. We went into this room seating about 50 people with the customs officials seated on a raised platform. As we went into this room a tall soldier in khaki uniform stood in the doorway watching the proceedings. We seated ourselves near the middle of this room; I sat next to the middle aisle, waiting to be processed. I was told some years afterwards that as I sat there I was playing with a handkerchief, which dropped on the floor, and as it did, this tall soldier came and handed it to me.

Finally we were called up for processing. When it came my turn to give my name this tall soldier came striding down the aisle and started talking to the customs people in English, which I did not understand. Finally he looked down at me and said, "Do you know who I am?" This he asked me in Arabic. Of course I did not know him. He informed me that he was my father, and then he embraced me. It was a great moment to which I hardly knew how to respond. I was now safe with my father and safe in America.

The Armenian family went to Boston, where they must have had either friends or relatives who would sponsor them. Father and I first went to Central Falls, Rhode Island, where two of my uncles lived; then we went to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where my father lived and worked.

Becoming Americanized

In Pittsburgh my father had the problem on his hands of caring for me, a boy almost ten, who could hardly speak a sentence in English. Again the Red Cross gave him aid in finding a good American home where he could board me. Here I received my earliest American training and schooling. Before being placed in this home I was constantly getting into trouble—fights with boys who made fun of my broken English, or attempts at it. It was nothing unusual to come home with a lump on my head when I had been in a quarrel where I came off the loser. As hard as my father was, he couldn't quite stand this. (My father had his own problems brought on by the war. Once he had been gassed and this gas was still in his system. At times he would lose consciousness of where he was. Then he would fall down on the sidewalk and would be picked up for drunkenness which, of course, was not the case. Years later a doctor advised him to work in a steel mill where he would probably sweat it out of his system.)

Mrs. Walmsley was the lady who operated this private home where several children were boarded. She had a son, Harry, who was 21, and a daughter, Grace, who was a little more than a year older than I. Mr. Walmsley lived a little more than a year after I came to board there. This was a good home for me. They were Christians who dealt with us justly and taught us good principles. I will always be grateful for the influence of this home. Since English was the only language spoken here, within less than a year, I was able to speak nothing but English, and when father visited me, I was not able to answer him properly in Arabic. But I understood all he said. Arabic was gradually leaving me, and, for this I have always been sorry. A young boy can learn easily but he also forgets easily. And “what you don't use, you lose.” Definitely I was no longer using my Arabic. I had no one to use it with.

Besides taking me regularly to Sunday School and church the Walmsleys taught me how to be American. I would still get in some quarrels with boys—and sometimes even girls. One lesson I learned too well was to be nice to the members of the opposite sex. In America men respected ladies and when they met them, as a sign of respect, they even tipped their hats to them. Since I wanted to be a real American more than anything else, I determined I would also do this. I started tipping my hat to all the ladies I happened to meet. One day I came out of a theater on Fifth Avenue in the downtown area. I tipped my hat to each lady who came by. Of course they didn't know me from Adam, neither did I know them. I began to think that this wasn't exactly such a good habit after all. It was really more desirable to leave your hat at home!

I remained in their home for more than two years (1921-1923) and would likely have stayed much longer, except that after Mr. Walmsley died and later Harry went away to college to study for the Lutheran ministry, it became necessary for Mrs. Walmsley to break up her home and move to Cleveland.

The following three years I moved around quite a bit. When I left the Walmsleys, I went to Rhode Island where my father had gone, and I lived with Uncle Jacob and Benjamin. This was in the summer of 1923. By this time uncle's two daughters, Hannah and Fahima, had come to this country. Hannah was married and so was Benjamin; later uncle was married again. Benjamin was still living with Jacob, and so was Fahima. It was while I was there that Benjamin's daughter was born (at home) and I ran to give him the news. Here I stayed for five months. In the meanwhile, my father had moved back to Pittsburgh where job opportunities were better. I will always remember my uncle bidding me farewell with tears in his eyes. Years later he admitted to me that he had no hope of my ever amounting to anything, but expected I would eventually go to the dogs. This very unhappy prospect saddened him to tears. His sad outlook, however, was well founded as the events of the next few years proved.

I shall not trouble the reader with too much of the sad decline of my life. Spiritually and morally I was headed for the rocks. From the time I witnessed a motion picture in Paris while

traveling toward America I began to be enraptured with this medium of “pleasure.” When I got to America, I became completely fascinated and finally “addicted.” Instead of engaging in sports and in many other healthful pursuits I spent much of my time seeing the movies. The only thing that kept me from spending more of my time there was the lack of money. This had a serious psychological effect on me. I tried to identify with the “heroes” and my imagination ran wild. Often times I pictured myself acting out their heroic deeds and at the same time be running on the sidewalks of Pittsburgh. I am sure that my addiction was extreme.

A series of events in my father’s life made matters worse. One summer I went to work with him in a foundry. When the summer ended I had to go back to school. But Uncle Alexander died about that time and father went to Rhode Island to the funeral. I went two days to school and dropped out. By lying about my age I went back to work at the foundry; I was just 15 years old. We were now living in Swissvale, a suburb of Pittsburgh. I had ceased going to Sunday School or to church, since my father didn’t go. Despite the wickedness that I had become involved in, I sensed a restraining hand upon me that kept me from further evil.

God’s providential mercy was especially evident when we finally moved next door to a family that attended a little Primitive Methodist Church in the area. The mother would often invite me to their Sunday School, but I always had an excuse for not going with them. One Saturday, after being again invited to attend Sunday School the next day, I consented to go with the Pierson family. I actually got up and went! I was put in a class of boys that was being taught by a well-saved and sanctified Scotsman. Here began a series of events that finally led to my conversion.

When it was discovered that I had come from Turkey and that my mother had been a Christian martyr, they wanted to hear my story, and gave me five minutes at the close of Sunday School to tell about it. I was very timid, but struggled through it. I made up my mind that I was not going to return, but the following week we moved within a couple of blocks of the church and there was no way I could keep from going, so I went again and again. The Lord had put a hook in my jaw that drew me to that Sunday School. Other groups wanted to hear my story. I began to think I was somebody very pious. The fact was that my life in the foundry and on the street did not tally with my new profession on Sunday. I was “good” on Sunday but didn’t have the power to be good the rest of the week. One day, after hearing me utter a terrible oath in the shop, a man stopped and rebuked me.

“Say, don’t you go to the little Methodist church on the hill?”

“Yes, sir,” I answered him.

“Then, why are you cursing around like that?” I threw this rebuke off by saying, “Oh, you fellows all curse and I picked it up from you. Who can help it?”

He said nothing more, but the preacher did on Sunday. He preached about hypocrisy, and I thought he must know all about me, though now I am certain he didn’t. God knew all about me and was convicting me of my sins, but I was very ignorant of all this then. There followed almost a year of this type of living and I became very miserable under the conviction of sin. At heart there came a desire to be good, but I found even at this young age that my willpower was broken and I couldn’t reform myself. I saw no way to help myself for I still did not understand the power of the Gospel and what Christ could do.

At this time I came within a second of losing my life. As a moulder’s apprentice I worked in the different parts of the foundry, including the core shop. After cores are made they are baked in ovens. There were two large ovens in this foundry, as well as a couple of small ones. It was my job to supply the coremakers with their supplies, such as sand, plates on which to place their cores, which then could be placed on trucks that would go into ovens. On this occasion I passed the oven door and was stooping down to pick up a plate when I heard a loud explosion. The heavy steel oven door was flung past me and hit one of the trucks. I was just a second from being

in the path of the door. If the oven had exploded a second earlier, or a second later I would have been in the path of the door! The ovens were gas-fired and in the one that exploded the fire had gone out, but the gas was still escaping. This caused the explosion. Surely God's hand was upon me!

My Sunday School teacher, David Hood, was always an inspiration to me. I noticed that he was very religious, but also that he seemed to enjoy his religion. It was a new thing to me to see someone happy in his religion. Brother Hood's face shone with the joy of the Lord. I felt that he was fortunate to have a religion like that, and in my heart wished that I could be like him, for I could see that he had real peace. It never dawned on me that others, perhaps, had a similar experience and that I could have it also. Up to this time, I had the impression that when people became religious they were ready to say good-bye to the joys of the world, so this was something new to me. I did not understand it, but I desired it.

My conceptions of Christianity were very limited. I wanted to go to heaven, but had no idea that anyone could know they were going there until after death, and perhaps the judgment. I figured that if anyone was good enough he would probably go there. So one day in this church they had a woman evangelist come in for a Sunday night service. She made quite an impression and there was a lot of conviction on the meeting. Quite a number went forward and I was among them. That night I determined to "turn over a new leaf" and be good from there on. But my resolution, though sincere, only lasted about a week. Some weeks later another evangelist came our way for a Sunday morning service, and made a fine appeal that truly moved me, and I found myself going forward with several others. I turned over another new leaf and made further resolutions, and this time it lasted only three or four days.

One of the main difficulties was that when I went forward no one came to deal with me as an individual seeking the Lord. We were all prayed for together, so those of us to whom this procedure was new received little, if anything, from God. Though I went to the altar, there was no real confession of sin on my part. I was still excusing myself for sinning. The fact that I was lost and that Jesus died to save me never registered with me, even though the Gospel was certainly being preached by our pastor, Rev. J. Elvin Zuck, and taught by the Sunday School teacher.

One Sunday night we had a visiting preacher from our community who spoke to us upon some serious issue that faced our community. He had us sign pledges to pray at least five minutes each day that week concerning that issue. To this day I don't remember what that issue was. Monday morning I woke up thinking of my pledge and soon got on my knees beside my bed and began praying. I found myself not only praying for this community issue, but also for myself, and I was praying from my heart. Since I was still quite ignorant of how to pray for my salvation, I found myself asking God to give me willpower to be a good boy. I wanted willpower to stop doing some things that I was sure God wasn't pleased with. God, in His abundant wisdom and mercy, looked down deep in my heart, and He must have seen a real desire in me to be a real Christian. In His love and tender mercy, He came to my heart that morning. I arose from my knees a new creature, though I couldn't have explained to anyone what did happen to me, for I didn't understand it myself. But from then on my life was completely changed. I went back to the foundry and found that I did not have to curse and swear. There was a new power in my life that put me above this low living. I began going to prayer meetings where I heard Christians testify to being saved. I began to understand that that was exactly what had happened to me, and soon joined them in this testimony. It was a reality! Life was now different!

At this stage, another one of the Sunday School teachers emerged into my life to help me. He taught a class of boys a little younger than myself, so I was not in his regular Sunday School class. On a week night Brother Samuelson had a Bible study for his class of boys. He invited me to join them, which I gladly accepted. For four weeks he taught us about the Holy Spirit, His



person and work. Among His works was that of sanctifying the believer. This truth warmed my heart, though I did not realize then that I needed to be sanctified by the Holy Ghost. I was the type that appropriated a thing as already done when I would hear of it. I concluded that when I first went forward and turned over a new leaf that I must have gotten saved, and that when I finally did get saved and received such willpower to cease from my old sinful habits that I must have gotten sanctified. I understood from this teaching that sanctification was a second work of Grace; that after a person is pardoned and justified, it was his privilege to be filled with the Holy Ghost and thereby be entirely sanctified. (Of course the work of sanctification begins in conversion.) I saw nothing wrong with this and for a while my experience seemed to fit it. So I unhesitatingly began to testify to this experience. This I did for almost two years, though in ignorance to a great extent.

It was after moving back into Pittsburgh proper, on Fifth Avenue in the Soho area, that I began to attend Everybody's Mission on Chatham Street.

Two great blessings came into my life as a result of attending Everybody's Mission. One was the fact that here the Wesleyan teaching of entire sanctification was clearly taught; the other was the fact that through attendance at this mission I became acquainted with God's Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I later went.

While others have resisted a call to preach and go away to college or Bible school to study for the ministry, I was just the opposite. Once I sensed that God wanted me to preach I was anxious to go away to some Bible school and study the Bible in depth. Off and on I would attend various meetings and conventions of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. I attended many of their youth rallies especially. I aspired to attend their Bible school at Nyack on the Hudson. However, when I sent in my application, I was rejected since I did not have a high school education. This greatly disturbed me, and I felt somewhat rebellious in my heart. But I never stopped loving the Lord and continued to study the Bible and was faithful in my devotions.

I had quit working at the foundry and was now working in a wholesale drug house in Pittsburgh. I formed the habit of reading the Bible on my knees before going to work. About this time when I was having this struggle over not getting to go to Bible school, I was reading in the Psalms. This particular morning I was reading Psalm 32 on my knees. When I came to the 8th verse something happened to me, for it said, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eyes." It was all I needed. Something within me gave way completely to the will of God. I have never had a controversy with God since then. There was a difference in my life as the Spirit of God seemed to take a new control of my will and affections. God filled me with His Spirit that day. Even those at work seemed to sense something different about me, though they had known me as a born-again Christian for about a year. I seemed to have gained poise as a result of this experience.

Answering the Call to Preach

I had sensed a call to preach for some time and at the time I shrank from it. However, with the hunger to know and understand the Bible I began to wish to pass on to others that which I was gaining in Bible knowledge. This was one reason I was so eager to go to Bible school. As I became established in my faith and Christian experience, I was also having opportunities to speak at young people's meetings, at cottage prayer meetings, at missions, and once in a while at street meetings.

A year or two before my conversion I had an interesting experience with a street meeting. It was Saturday evening, and I had gone to a movie on Butler Street. It was still early, and I knew there was another movie house several blocks up on Butler Street. So I started walking in that direction. About half way between these two theaters I came across a crowd of people on a corner. There was hymn singing and testifying. This attracted me, and I stood watching from a sense of curiosity. As they were about to close the meeting, they asked for a show of hands for those who wanted prayer. A number raised their hands, and so did I. Then I went on to the second movie. This, as far as I can remember, was the first time I had ever made such a move toward God, and I'm not sure that I fully understood what I was doing. Several years later I found out that this group, mostly young people, was from the Northside Christian and Missionary Alliance on Arch Street. I had the privilege of going out with this group in street meetings and doing some of my first preaching.

At Everybody's Mission I was being used from time to time. In the summer I had the opportunity of speaking to the young people. I suggested that we go out in the yard for our meeting since it was a nice evening out. The Mission was a converted dwelling at that time on Chatham Street, across from a YWCA. So I stood on the porch and preached salvation, and because I did so want the passersby to get the message, I preached as loudly as I could. The board of Everybody's Mission was in session in an upstairs room of the mission. They also heard me preaching and decided to give me a license to preach. (This was the summer before I went to Bible school, and a year later they ordained me when I was home for the summer. In my ordination at Everybody's Mission I had the distinct privilege of having in attendance Rev. E. G. Marsh, professor at God's Bible School. He happened to be in the area of Pittsburgh and was to bring a message at the mission. Brother Watson asked him to lay hands on me and offer the ordination prayer, which he did. Later, when I transferred to the Churches of Christ in Christian Union, this ordination was fully accepted. Former students of G.B.S. will especially appreciate this fact of Brother Marsh's involvement.)

I have already mentioned that by attending this mission I became acquainted with God's Bible School in Cincinnati. At that time it was possible for the school to have many of the students work their way through school right at the school. So I sent my application in to the school in the Spring of 1930. What a thrill it was to receive a letter of acceptance as a work student!

The Sunday before I was to leave for Cincinnati, Rev. O. O. Watson, the Superintendent of Everybody's Mission, asked me to preach in the afternoon service, which would be a sort of a farewell service. On Saturday evening before this I was eating at a Syrian-Lebanese restaurant on Wylie Avenue. My father and I frequently ate there. Several others were eating there, and I began a conversation with two men who were sitting at this long table. Both were either Syrian or Lebanese. I witnessed to them and told them of the fact that I was preaching the next afternoon at this mission, which was fairly close. The one was very attentive and interested, but the other was a skeptic and soon started an argument on evolution. I felt that my witness had gone down the drain. However, the next afternoon, to my surprise, the more receptive gentleman walked into the mission. I have no record of what I preached on that afternoon, but I felt let down. After I preached, Brother Watson opened the service for testimonies. Several testified and

again I was surprised to see this Syrian gentleman stand to his feet. In my mind I thought, “Well, like so many from Bible lands, he has some opinion to give” (Oh ye of little faith!). His testimony went something like this: He told of our conversation of the night before in the restaurant; then he said, “I went to the rooming house where I stay; I took a bath and casually laid on my bed. I began to think of our conversation at the restaurant with Thomas. I began to think about God and tears began to come to my eyes. I got on my knees and prayed and gave my heart to God, and now I feel so much better.” To say that I was amazed is putting it mildly! Where I felt a failure and defeated in my witness the night before, the Holy Spirit had taken over and blessed the little effort I had put forth. It was a great lesson that I’ve had to learn many times.

I spent three years at God’s Bible School: two years in the Personal Worker’s course, which was all Bible study, church history, missions, and other related subjects. Due to the fact that I did not have a high school education I could take no more Bible work. So the third year I started in as a freshman in high school, for there was, and is, an accredited high school there. At the close of my freshman year I did not get to return to G.B.S. I had become in debt to the school that year. I took a little mission church in Lancaster, Ohio, under the Churches of Christ in Christian Union in 1933, and that year I also enrolled at the Lancaster High School—I was the oldest student at the high school. In two more years I was able to graduate by taking extra courses.

I pastored this mission church for only one year. At the close of the church year I was voted out! It was a very humbling experience, but as I look back on it I think I deserved it. I stayed in Lancaster another year so that I could graduate. That year I supported myself in school by taking weekend meetings and revivals. It was a difficult year, but it had its recompense, for that was the year I met my wife!

I had united with the main church of the denomination in the city of which Rev. Floyd Terry was the pastor. His father, Rev. A. L. Terry, pastored the church in Delaware, Ohio. He invited me to his church for a weekend meeting in the Fall of 1934. It was during this meeting that I met Violet Harris. She was the pianist, and also the young people’s president. That Sunday Rev. Terry was to dedicate a new mission church in Marysville, just 16 miles from Delaware. I had by this time bought an old Star, with running boards that had rusted away. The pastor somehow worked it out that I would drive my old Star and take the pianist with me. That was the start of our romance!

The following Spring the Delaware Young People decided to have their own revival meeting. Guess who was the evangelist! Violet and I had been corresponding for several months before this revival, and I was the natural choice for evangelist. During this meeting Violet and I decided to get married as soon as school was over. So on May 29, 1935, I graduated and the next evening we were married before a full house at the Delaware church.



Rev. & Mrs. Thomas E. Hermiz Wedding Day—May 30, 1935

That year I took a little country church, called Lippincott, which later we moved into Urbana, Ohio. But at the end of the church year Brother Terry urged me to run my name as pastor for the Delaware church, as he was leaving after having pastored there for 14 years. Teresa was born during that pastorate in Urbana on April 7, 1936. Then almost two years later Tom was born on February 22, 1938.

The year of 1938 brought a great tragedy into my life. On August 13th of that year my father was shot by a man in Diamond, Ohio, not far from Youngstown. He had had a quarrel with a friend over a dog, and they had a scuffle. They were separated and each man went towards his house. According to my stepmother, before father reached home he decided to go to the other man's house and make peace with him. But within 25 feet of the man's house, the man came out with a revolver and shot him. My father was unarmed. This hit me hard. I had felt a burden for him for more than a month and had our church people pray for him. Several felt they had prayed through for him, and I certainly

felt that I had. On the evening of August 13th we were having an evening snack, when around eleven o'clock the telephone rang. The message was that my father had been shot; furthermore, he had died in the ambulance before they could get him to the hospital in Salem,

Ohio.

That night my brother-in-law, Marion Guy Harris, drove me to the place where my father's body lay in a funeral home in Newton Falls. As I lay in the back seat, I thought of the many times I had told audiences that I had completely forgiven the Moslems who had killed my mother. That was remote in comparison to this that had just occurred. How did I feel towards the man who had murdered my father? I found no hate for the man in my heart, though I hated his deed. In fact, I told the Lord that if I should meet the man I would offer him the love of God to the best of my ability. This never happened.

Due to the quick maneuvering of the murderer's attorneys the grand jury brought no indictment against the slayer. Unfortunately, my father had gone to the man's home after the quarrel, and his presence there could be interpreted in such a way that he could plead self-defense, even though my father was unarmed. I received legal advice to pursue the case, that the man had actually murdered my father in cold blood. While I approved of the law taking its full course, I received further advice from the district attorney that he felt it was a lost cause. At the same time I refused to harbor any hate, or ill-will towards the slayer. The grace of God, through Jesus Christ, was sufficient for this trial also.

Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him [Christ], seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).

Thomas & Violet Hermiz August 22, 1976



Pastoring and Raising a Family

God has given us many wonderful years in pastoring churches in five states and raising six children—three girls and three boys.

The first pastorate, following our marriage, was a little country church called Lippincott in western Ohio, just a few miles north of Urbana. About the middle of the church year it was decided to relocate the congregation to the city of Urbana. We found a hall above Cussin & Fearn's and started holding meetings. It was a good move; our attendance started to grow. However, the hall had only one stairway, and fire regulations required that there be two, so we were forced to vacate this hall. After this the church had a difficult time getting established in the city. In the ensuing years the church moved several times. Eventually Urbana became one of our great churches of the denomination. However, I stayed only one year at the Lippincott-Urbana charge. At the urging of Rev. A. L. Terry that I follow him at Delaware, Ohio (was leaving after pastoring there 14 years), the church extended a call to me, and I accepted.

During the Lippincott-Urbana year we first lived in West Liberty, about 8 miles north of Urbana. But during the last few months of the church year we moved in with Violet's parents in Delaware, since we were expecting our first child. Teresa Mae was born on April 7, 1936, at Delaware, in the home of Violet's parents. Since I pastored that year only on a part-time basis I conducted ten revival meetings during the year. Those were depression days; I got \$10.00 per Sunday, every other Sunday.

Our pastorate in Delaware lasted three years, from 1936 to 1939. We experienced great revival here and a good increase both in attendance and membership. This was Violet's home church. It was while we were in Delaware that our first son was born. Thomas Harris Hermiz was born in the parsonage on February 22, 1938. That was also the year my father was killed. Tom was just six months old, and my father never got to see him.

In the Spring of 1939, I conducted a revival meeting in Athens, a borough in northeastern Pennsylvania. The pastor was sick in the hospital, and a couple of months later he died. This was an independent Tabernacle. Upon the death of Rev. Goodell, the pastor, I received an invitation to go there as pastor. After much prayer we felt the leading of God to go there. We had eight fruitful years at Athens. Also, God gave us three more children, all born at the Robert Parker Hospital in Sayre, Pennsylvania, the borough adjoining Athens. Joseph Emanuel was born April 15, 1941; Violet Ruth was born July 20, 1943; and Mary Esther was born January 14, 1946.

Before we left Athens the Tabernacle did unite with our denomination. We also organized a church near Owego, New York, about 20 miles northeast of Athens, and one in Towanda, Pennsylvania, the county seat of Bradford County.

After serving in Athens for eight years we felt that we should make a change. We received a call from another independent church called Trinity Memorial Church in Endicott, New York. Here we spent six years, and here our youngest son, John Wesley Hermiz, was born on February 4, 1953, at Ideal Hospital in Endicott.

While pastoring Trinity Memorial Church I became fully acquainted with a small denomination of 13 churches, known as Reformed Methodist. Actually its history went clear back to 1815 and once had several hundred churches. However, over a period of many years the majority of the churches united with other denominations, leaving these 13. I attended their camp meeting at Lily Lake and preached in a number of their churches. This culminated in the group merging with our denomination in 1952. This became, with our other churches in the area, the Northeastern District of the Churches of Christ in Christian Union. At the organizing council I was elected District Superintendent, which position I held for four years, while also pastoring.

The Reformed Methodists had a small congregation in Endicott not too far from Trinity Memorial Church. Trinity refused a merger of the two congregations, so I took what had been

the Reformed Methodist Church of Endicott and organized a new Church of Christ in Christian Union. The congregation, however, was moved and we built a new church in Endwell. At the end of three years I resigned as District Superintendent so that I could give more of my time to the church. I pastored this congregation for eleven years. While here, three of our children were married, but more on that later.

It was while we were at Endwell that I had my first opportunity to travel to the Middle East. In 1957 I was invited to travel with the Christian Friendship Caravan that summer. The primary motivation for my going was the hope that I might find my sister in Turkey. The plan was to leave the Caravan, while they had a prolonged stay in Greece, and visit my relatives in Lebanon and Syria. My youngest uncle on my mother's side was still living in the city of Kamishli in Northeastern Syria, about 15 miles from Midyat in Turkey. Uncle Antun felt certain he knew the village in which my sister had been adopted. What I did not know was that in order to get into that part of Turkey I needed a special permit, since it was a Turkish military zone. This permit has to be applied for at the Turkish capital of Ankara. There really was no time to go through all of this, as it would have taken at least a month to accomplish. So I was not able to enter that part of Turkey. This was a great disappointment. But I had to accept it as the will of God. However, there were three great benefits that came as a result of this tour:

1. I got to see a great many of my relatives in Syria and Lebanon. It was the only time that I was able to see Uncle Antun, for he died several years later.
2. It was a great experience for me to visit all those 15 countries of Europe and the Middle East, especially the Holy Land.
3. Our son, Tom, got his first experience of pastoring. He was in Bible College and the church invited him to pastor while I was gone for 12 weeks. God blessed him and the church gained, rather than lost ground during the summer months.

I had begun to feel that my ministry in Endwell should terminate, since I had served the congregation for 11 years. So when I received a call from our North Columbus Church to become its pastor, I accepted the call. It was during my pastorate at North Church that the congregation voted to relocate further north. Since the church owned the property on Karl Road, we built a new structure there. Altogether, I pastored the congregation for five years.

In 1969 I accepted a call to pastor the First Church of Christ in Christian Union of Evansville, Indiana. We stayed in Evansville six years. During this time Mary Esther graduated from nursing school at Alton, Illinois, so she came and lived with us at Evansville. She attended Evansville University for one year and got her degree in nursing. She also became our youth leader and really did a great job with the young people.

While in Evansville I made two more tours of the Holy Land—in 1970 and 1974.

From Evansville we went to pastor our church at Warren, Michigan. Here I was also close to my cousin, Faye Shad, who had lived at Highland Park for many years with her family. She has four children, all of whom now have their own families. So I had considerable contact with these relatives in the five years that we were at Warren, which is a suburb of Detroit.

Warren was a difficult church to build in attendance, but we have some very precious people there who have come to mean a great deal to us. While in Warren, I made another tour of the Holy Land. Violet went with me on this tour as she had done in 1970.

After five years in Warren I received a call from our church in Washington Court House, Ohio, to become the associate pastor there with Dr. Stan Toler. The church is also known as Heritage Memorial Church, and has recently been relocated from Gregg Street to Dayton Avenue (Old U.S. 35). It is the next largest church in our denomination, second only to Lancaster. Here my special responsibility is to minister to the Senior Adults. I have a weekly service

for them on Thursday morning at ten o'clock.



The Hermiz Children

Teresa Mae Hermiz was born in Delaware, Ohio, on April 7, 1936, in the home of Violet's parents. In the ensuing years Teresa majored in music and has become an accomplished pianist and gives piano lessons. She has two grown children now: Charmin and David Cyrus. At present she is living in Florida.

Thomas Harris Hermiz was also born in Delaware, Ohio, during our pastorate there, on February 22, 1938. In later years Tom became accomplished in several areas of Christian ministry. In high school at Endicott, New York, he learned to play the trumpet, and here he also began his singing career. But his greatest accomplishment, under God, has been preaching. He is in demand as an evangelist. He has also pastored several churches, including our largest church at Lancaster, Ohio. He then became Executive Director of the Christian Holiness Association (formerly National Holiness Association). During this time he received an Honorary Doctorate from the Seminary of the Evangelical Church of North America located in Oregon. He graduated from Circleville (Ohio) Bible College, but also had one year at Vennard College. He took some work at Ohio State University also. In 1979 he became the president of the World Gospel Mission, with headquarters in Marion, Indiana, which position he is now holding. In June of 1957 he married Ella Mae Longberry.

Joseph Emmanuel Hermiz was born in Sayre, Pennsylvania, on April 15, 1941. Joe excelled in school and during his high school years he was outstanding in his Christian life and service. He majored in music, especially the organ and the guitar. For a number of years he has been giving guitar lessons, both private and in parochial schools. He has one son, Joshua Thomas Hermiz. He lives in Columbus, Ohio.

Violet Ruth (Hermiz) Kumar, was born July 20, 1943, at Sayre, Pennsylvania. We usually call her Ruth to distinguish her from her mother. Ruth's major accomplishment has been as a wife and mother of four children. In 1964 she married Dr. Ashok Kumar, from South India. She met him while he was in internship at Wilson Memorial Hospital in Johnson City, New York. He served his residency in Warren, Ohio, and they have settled there where Ashok has built an excellent practice. They have a son and three daughters: Peter, Keisha, Michelle, and Asha. Peter is now attending Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

Mary Esther Hermiz was also born in Sayre, Pennsylvania, on January 14, 1946. After finishing high school she went to Circleville Bible College, where she received her call to the mission field. After graduating from C. B. C. she took nurse's training at Alton, Illinois, where she graduated with high honors. She later got her degree in nursing at Evansville University, then took a course in Midwifery at Hyden, Kentucky. She graduated in 1974, and in the same year our church sent her as a missionary nurse and midwife to Papua New Guinea. She has served two full terms on the field and is now attending Indiana University in Indianapolis to further her medical training.



Mary Esther Hermiz

While Mary was still a missionary nurse in Papua New Guinea, a building was constructed to serve as a place of worship and other activities, especially for the National Christians. The National Christians wanted to name it after Mary and call it the “Mary Hermiz Memorial.” To this Mary objected since she was still alive. She suggested that they name it after her grandmother and call it “The Tirzah Hermiz Memorial.” This was agreed upon.

During the dedication and placement of the above plaque in the building, Rev. Ronald Hood, Field Superintendent of this mission field, gave the story of Tirzah Hermiz’s martyrdom for Christ in Turkey, as the story is told in this book.



John Wesley Hermiz was born February 4, 1953, at Ideal Hospital in Endicott, New York. There were seven years between Mary Esther and John and it was like a renewal of life for Violet (she was in her forties) when he was born. John also is musically inclined. He plays the guitar and sings. His wife, the former Mary Vallance, is also a talented singer and musician. They are greatly involved in the musical program of Grace Brethren Church in Worthington, Ohio. John works for the White Furniture Company, where he is the service manager. Mary nurses part-time. They now have two sons and one daughter: Matthew, Daniel, and Hannah.

We are grateful to the Lord for each of our six children, thirteen living grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. One granddaughter, Karen Hermiz, went to be with the Lord December 27, 1982. Her father gives the account in another chapter of this book.

God is amazing! He can take a little lad, born in a land gripped by conflict, preserve him, guide him, and through a series of events, finally bring him into many years of productivity for His kingdom. Such is the case in the life of my dear friend, Rev. Thomas E. Hermiz.

It has been my privilege to know him now for many years. He is a gifted preacher of the Word, with the heart of a pastor. His well-written articles in numbers of Christian periodicals have been a special blessing to thousands across the years. His book, *What We Teach*, has served

as a guideline for preachers and laymen.

I am glad Rev. Thomas E. Hermiz has decided to write this book. You will appreciate the style of his writing and the providence of God so evident in his life.

ROBERT KLINE,

Thomas E. Hermiz is presently serving as associate pastor with me in Washington Court House, Ohio. He is a great personal friend and I consider him to be my pastor. His life has been an inspiration to me and many other pastors. His talents as a Bible expositor are outstanding and his ability as a counselor is unsurpassed. As you read his life story, you will be impressed with the real story about this great man of God whose loving shepherd heart is unparalleled. His great desire to win others to Christ is a challenge to us all.

DR. STAN A. TOLER

After You Have Suffered Awhile

By Dr. Thomas H. Hermiz



Preface

I preached the following message, “After You Have Suffered Awhile,” at the Lakeland, Florida, Holiness Camp Meeting on February 18, 1983, just seven weeks after our daughter, Karen, died very suddenly with meningococcal meningitis on December 27, 1982.

In this message on human suffering, I share some of the things we have learned from this traumatic experience. I have received many requests for the message. At the suggestion of my father, I have decided to publish it in this reprinted version of his book, *The Trials and Triumphs of Thomas E. Hermiz*. It is my prayer that the message will be a special source of blessing to those who are going through the hard places of life. May you experience a special sufficiency of God’s grace as we have.

Even though I prepared the manuscript for this publication six months after Karen’s death, I found it painful to relive, in detail, the last forty-eight hours of her life. However, Karen’s death has brought our entire family closer together and closer to God. We are praising the Lord for this in the midst of our sorrow. We have watched God make this experience work for our good. To God be the glory!

More than \$13,000 has been contributed to World Gospel Mission as a memorial for our daughter. Our many friends have wept with us and prayed for us. We have so much for which to praise God.

“After You Have Suffered Awhile”

I Peter 5:10

On December 22, 1982, Ella Mae and I returned home from an exciting trip to Kenya, Africa. My responsibilities in Kenya included a heavy preaching schedule, consultation with our W.G.M. missionaries, and dealing with administrative decisions.

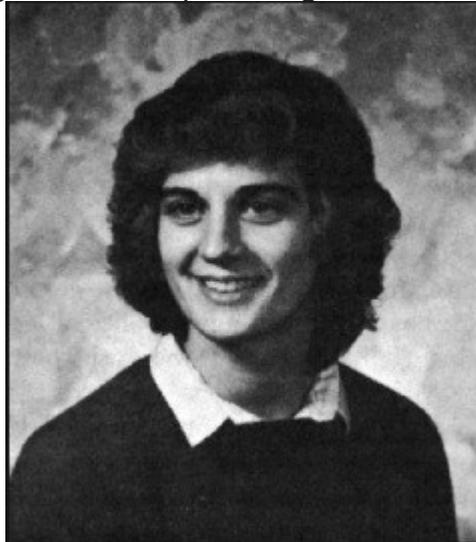
I will never forget the concluding service as an estimated crowd of 10,000 Kenyans came to worship the Lord. After I delivered a brief message, the president of the nation, President Daniel Arap Moi, addressed the congregation. It was thrilling to hear this born-again political leader exhort the people to live righteous lives through the power of Jesus Christ.

Three days after returning home, on Christmas morning, our exhilaration turned to deep concern as our daughter, Karen, became ill. Although skilled physicians did all they could to save her, she died very suddenly on Dec. 27, 1982. The cause of her death was meningococcal meningitis. She was only sick for forty-eight hours.

Karen was 22 years old. Six months prior to her death she had graduated from Olivet Nazarene College with a degree in communications.

In this message I want to share with you some of the lessons we are learning from this experience. I trust they will be especially helpful to you who are going through the tests and trials of life.

One of the prayers I have offered nearly every day since December 27 has been, “Father, help me to learn everything from this experience You want me to learn. May it enable me to be a better person and a stronger Christian than ever before. Give me the ability to share this knowledge with a hurting world.” In light of this prayer I have attempted to be completely open and honest in expressing the grief we are experiencing.



Karen Hermiz

Words are inadequate to describe the pain and sense of loss Karen’s death has brought us. Many times I have cried out to God, “It hurts!”

There have also been periods of deep frustration. If we had realized what was happening, how nice it would have been to have had one more conversation and one more prayer together. The last time I prayed with her she was struggling so hard to breathe, I do not know if she knew I was there.

The last time I kissed her it was through a mask because of the highly contagious nature of her disease. The last time I told her I loved her, she could not respond. I am learning not to dwell

on these frustrations but to remember her as she lived.

When Jesus was on the cross He asked the question, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” I must confess that more than a few times I have asked God, “Why, Lord, when she was so good and so healthy?” I can say before God that I have asked this question without rebellion in my heart toward Him.

Since there are few satisfactory answers to the question, Why? we are attempting to ask the far better question—What? Lord, what can we learn from this experience that will help us to serve You better?

We miss Karen so much. However we believe that she is with the Lord. In our minds we know there are far worse things that could have happened to her. In our hearts we still feel the emptiness and sense of loss.

We are comforted with the assurance that just as she was suddenly taken from us, there will be a glad morning of resurrection when we will suddenly be reunited. Heaven is more precious and personal than ever before.

Never in our lives have we been more keenly conscious of God’s sustaining grace. We have also been greatly strengthened through the prayers of God’s people. During the funeral service people all over the world were praying for us. God gave us such a calmness of spirit and mind that I was able to stand and share a few things out of my heart. I would not have been able to do this without a special sufficiency of God’s grace.

We have much for which to praise the Lord. We thank Him for allowing us to love and enjoy Karen for 22 years. We watched her develop into a young woman with strength of character and beautiful attitudes. She was a sensitive and caring person.

We cried with her, laughed with her, and prayed with her. Although we miss her she brought a great deal of joy and happiness into our home. Her home-going has brought a renewed determination to each member of our family to be faithful to God so we might be with her at the end of our life’s journey.

The scriptural text for this message on human suffering is I Peter 5:6-11.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you
in due time:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh
about, seeking whom he may devour:

Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are
accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle
you.

To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

On New Year’s Day, I picked up the January edition of *The Reader’s Digest*. I discovered it carried an excerpt from Rabbi Kushner’s book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Some of you may have read the full book or the excerpt in *Reader’s Digest*. Many good, sound, practical things were contained in it. There was more Wesleyan-Arminian theology in it than I

find in many of our own Wesleyan writings when it comes to the subject of suffering and sorrow. There were other things I did not agree with, but basically, it was very helpful.

The Rabbi was raising an old question that many have asked. “Why do people that love and serve the Lord experience adversity, sorrow, and grief? Why does tragedy come into the lives of people who love the Lord and who are doing their best to be all He would have them to be?”

When a person who has lived an ungodly life experiences adversity, we pass it off rather nonchalantly, saying, “They’re getting what they asked for. They are reaping what they sowed.” We do not get terribly upset about it. When a good person goes through sorrow, we often struggle with this question, “Why do the righteous suffer?”

One of the things the Scripture makes clear is that just because a person is righteous, this does not guarantee he will be exempt from adversity. God never promised us an easy road. In spite of what you might be hearing from some popular preachers today, even though you pay your tithes and offerings, God has not promised that you will always have health and prosperity. He never promised us an easy road if we would live a holy life and seek to be good churchmen.

Job is as good an example as you will find in the Word of God, when it comes to suffering. If there was ever a man that could have been exempt from suffering because of his goodness, it would have been Job. The record tells us the kind of man he was. It reveals that he was perfect, upright, feared God, and turned away from evil. His own wife, the one who probably knew him better than anyone else, said he was a man of integrity.

In spite of his marvelous reputation, the wrath of Satan was unleashed upon him in a horrendous fashion. Therefore we must conclude, if a good man like Job suffered great losses, no one is exempt from suffering and tragedy just because he is righteous. Suffering is simply a part of life. It is a result of the curse of sin that Adam brought on the human race. With all of our infirmities and limitations, we must learn how to deal with it. We must learn to accept and adjust to it when it comes our way. You do not have to look for some mysterious reason why people get sick and die.

Many have tried to comfort us in recent weeks by telling us that God had a special purpose and reason in taking Karen to heaven. We have found little comfort in those words. I do not believe that God had any special purpose or reason why Karen got sick and why she died. I simply believe that Karen was exposed to a disease that was fatal to her. It has been fatal to many others across the years. Some have been able to resist it. Karen was one of those whose body could not handle the disease, and she went to be with the Lord. This is the difficult and hard side of life. It is the aspect of life that we wish would not invade our homes at such untimely moments. Sometimes we find a shallow sense of comfort in the thought that maybe God had some special reason for this.

Someone said to me recently, “God must know He can really trust you and Ella Mae to allow you to go through this.” No, it is not that we are special, but it is the fact that God supplies to us a special sufficiency of His grace. I do not believe that God looked down and said, “I am going to prove to the world that my grace is sufficient so I am going to take your daughter to heaven.” No, God does not have to prove Himself by hurting His children. Disease and death are simply a part of human life.

I find much more comfort in the fact that God can make all things work together for our good and for His glory. God can take the tragedies of life, that are the result of a sin-stained race, and He can turn all those negative things into something positive by giving us His special grace. By doing this He brings glory to His own name. The Lord takes that which the devil intended for evil, and He turns it around and makes it turn out for our good and for His glory. If our attitude is right and if our trust is in the Lord, we can come through these events stronger instead of weaker.

In this passage, Peter, with one sweeping stroke, places suffering in its proper perspective. He declares that when you compare it to the glories of eternal life, it is just for a little while. He

did not say it was easy, or pleasant, but just for a little while. It may not seem that way to us when we are in the midst of the battle. When the day is long, the night dark, the valley deep, the pain persistent, and the problems perplexing, it never seems like a little while. When hot tears are coursing down our faces, and when we have that strange sensation in the pit of our stomach, as we watch our world crumble, it seldom seems like a little while.

Peter helps us in this passage to take the long view. His word to us is that when you compare your trial to the glories of eternity, it is just for a little while. The night will not last forever. The pain will disappear. The broken heart will be healed. The diseased body will be restored. God shall be glorified. This truth helps me so much when I am going through the difficult experiences of life.

Recently, I thought of this verse while sitting in the dentist's office. If I could just white-knuckle it for a few minutes, it would be all over. In 45 minutes I would be back at the office, and everything would be fine. It would all be history. Well, 45 minutes later, I was back at the office, and it was history. There was still a bit of pain, but the worst was over. It did not last forever.

I would not want to compare the tragedies and the heartaches that you have experienced with seeing a dentist. But the same principle is true. If we can hold on to God's hand and cling to His promises, the sun will break through the clouds again. We will sense His presence once again. The glass that veils Him from us until we cannot fully see His glory, shall one day be removed, and we will see Him face to face. It will be more than worth it all when we see Him. Some of these things, we will understand better when we see Him.

If we will keep this perspective and keep our attitudes right, then all of the sorrows of life can only serve as a blessing rather than a curse.

One of our greatest temptations when we are going through adversity is to give in to self-pity. The moment you begin to wallow in self-pity, you are on dangerous ground. If self-pity is not resisted, it will soon turn into bitterness. And that bitterness will come between you and God. It will eat on you like a cancer until you are less of a whole person than what God would have you to be. You will lose physical, emotional, and spiritual vitality. You will find yourself withdrawing and living within a secluded world rather than opening yourself up so God can bring healing into your heart and life.

I have a feeling I am speaking to some precious people in this audience, who, because of tragedy, have withdrawn from a normal life and built walls around themselves. You are hurting and do not want anyone to know how much you hurt. You are unwilling to open up and share the feelings that are in your hearts. It might be anger, bitterness, or resentment. You need to unbottle those emotions and confess them to God. You have made the mistake of cutting yourself off from the ones who could help you. You are suffering far more than you should and far more than God wants you to.

One of the thoughts God put on my heart is, do not withdraw. Do not run away and hide. Open up. There is healing that comes from the family of God and from His Word. Continue to live a normal life. Fight back your tears and keep on marching forward. Enjoy living for God and seek to be a blessing to others.

We are determined, by the grace of God, to live the way God wants us to live. It will never be quite the same at our house again. But we are going to go on living, we trust, more like Jesus. We cannot withdraw. There is a world out there that needs us. A world that does not know how to cope with tragedy, disaster, and death. They need to see that Christians are different because God's grace is adequate and sufficient.

You will probably never be any greater blessing than when you are hurting the most. There is nothing unique or unusual about what has happened to any of us. Sometimes we think no one else has had it as hard as we. But the Bible tells us there is no temptation taken us but such as is

common to man. I love the next part of the verse. I have preached it all over this country and around the world. I have never stood on it as much as I have in recent weeks and that is the fact that God has promised He will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able, but will, with every temptation, make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. I do not know what God may allow in these next few days and weeks of my life, but I am persuaded of this one fact that if God sees it is more than I can handle, He will provide a way of relief and escape. He will sustain me with His everlasting arms.

I must say to you I have a greater sense of security and strength today than ever before. Not because I am able, but because He is able. We have walked a lonely road together. I have sensed His eternal arms about me and found myself singing “Jesus Never Fails.” He never has, and He never will.

I. Through Suffering God Will Perfect Us

Peter tells us there are several things suffering will do for us. He tells us it will perfect us. This word means “to supply that which is missing.” It is the word commonly used for setting a fracture. It is the same word that is used in the Gospel of Mark 1:19, for mending the nets.

Sometimes it seems like the sorrows of life will almost literally break us into little pieces. I am persuaded that if we will accept adversity with humility and trust, the very opposite is true. God has promised He will mend the fractures. He will heal the broken heart, and put us back together, stronger and better than ever before. This can be true for all of us. We will either become bitter and resentful, or we will become more understanding, with greater compassion, and with a kinder, more useful spirit. Suffering can add to a person’s character that which is lacking. It can repair the weakness, and it can add the greatness that is missing.

One writer tells how his mother lost her son, and said, “That is where my mother got her soft eyes. That is why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child.” I have looked into the eyes of some mothers and there was no softness. There was a hardness. There was a bitterness. There was a callousness that they had allowed to come into their eyes that reflected their spirit. Their attitudes were wrong toward the adversities and the trials of life. How much better it is to be like this young man’s mother. Suffering had done something for her that an easy way could never have done. If we are to reach a place of greater maturity, we will have to be willing to go through the flames of affliction and pass through the waters of tribulations. Then one day, we will stand before God refined by the fire, pure, and holy in His sight.

Sir Edward Elger, the composer, listened to a talented young lady sing one of his own compositions. She sang with exceptional purity, clarity, and range, with almost perfect technique. When she had finished, Sir Edward turned to the person on his right and said softly, “She will really be great someday when something happens to break her heart.” You see, it is hard to sing about a broken heart unless you have felt those hot tears and experienced a broken heart.

I would not ask for a broken heart. It is indeed too painful. I have listened to people sing rather glibly, the song, “Whatever It Takes.” In it they sing about trading sunshine for rain, comfort for pain and express their willingness to give up everything near and dear. Much of the time I have felt that the singer had some kind of glamorous view of suffering. I am not going to ask for suffering or pain. I like sunshine and the comforts of life. But I can declare to you today that if God allows suffering to come into our lives, He can use it for our good and His glory. It can bring honor to His name if our confidence and trust is in Him. He knows how much we can bear. Therefore, I can say with confidence in the midst of the storm, “Father, not my will, but thine be done.”

Someone has said, “God allows some things He does not intend. He permits some things He does not will.” If you run into a fatal germ, you get sick and die. If you step out in front of a

speeding car you will take a premature trip to heaven. Just because it happened does not mean this was your day to die, nor does it mean it was God's will. You might have lived another 15 or 20 years. You made the mistake of stepping in front of a speeding automobile. The laws of nature tell us because of the impact, you are likely to die and hopefully, take a premature trip to heaven.

If God chooses to heal your body, He has that power. This is what we would call a miracle. I believe in miracles. Most of the time, the laws of nature are in force and we will have to live and die according to those laws. Therefore, when tragedy comes our way, how much better it is to know our trust is in Him, and that He can use all these things to put us together, better and stronger than ever before.

II. Through Suffering God Will Strengthen and Establish Us

Secondly, I want you to notice that through suffering God will strengthen and establish us. I will take these two words together because they are similar in the original language. They mean "to make you strong and firm, to fill with strength." God, through suffering, can make you firm and solid as granite that cannot be moved. No one really knows what his faith means until his faith has been tested and tried in the furnace of affliction and the storms of life. Isn't it true there is something doubly precious about a faith that has emerged from pain, sorrow, or disappointment, burning more brightly than ever before? What an inspiration it is to us.

We had a fire at the headquarters in Indiana a few months ago. I believe it was the windiest day of the year. At first it was just a small fire in the back of the building. Firemen arrived and opened one of the huge doors and the wind whipped through the building. I was amazed at how the flames were driven in seconds from one end of the building to the other. It whipped the flames into a fire far greater and more powerful than it had been before.

The winds of life may put out a weak flame, but the storms of life can also fan a flame into a stronger, more powerful flame, until you can become a greater witness and blessing than ever before. Suffering will either cause you to collapse or you will come out of it like an athlete who, from the rigors of his training, has a toughness of fiber, a staying power, an endurance that no demand on him can overcome. He is like steel that is tempered in the fire.

It is my prayer that your faith will be so established and strengthened, that all of the blasts of hell and all of the storms of life, shall not defeat you. But they will make you stronger and unmovable until your character will be, not like writing in the sand, but like an inscription chiseled into the Rock, where the storms and the cold and heat cannot erase it. This will not happen overnight. It is going to take some cold winters, some March winds, and some hot summers to do it. But we can reach a place in the grace of God where our trust and faith is in Him, where we are rooted and grounded, steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Like a mighty oak, we can stand tall and firm. Blessed be His name.

III. Through Suffering God Will Settle Us

Finally, Peter said, through suffering, God will settle us. The word means "to lay the foundation." It is only when we have to meet sorrow and suffering that we are driven down to the bedrock of our faith. It is in these moments that we discover the things which can be shaken and the things which cannot be shaken. It is in the moment that our world is caving in that we discover the things which are merely decorations and the things that are essential. It is in life's trials that we discover the great principles upon which life is founded. It helps us to put everything in perspective.

I must remind you that suffering will not automatically do these things for us. It can drive

you to bitterness, resentment, and despair. If you allow it, suffering can destroy your faith. It can do to you what it had done to a minister's wife who said to me, "I don't pray anymore. Why should I pray? God didn't answer my prayers. My daughter has ruined her life." She had allowed her disappointment to turn into bitterness against God. But if you accept adversity in trust, and with faith in God, then out of suffering comes the perfecting of Christian character that an easy life would never bring. So I want to say with Peter, "May 'the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you,' until you will be unmovable, unshakeable, rooted and grounded in God's grace and love."

Karen was only ill for 48 hours. When we left her at two o'clock in the morning to get some rest, the doctors had just assured us that in 48 hours she would be much better. Before leaving the hospital, Ella Mae and I went in to talk with her one more time. We had prayer together, and we tried to assure her that she was going to be all right. She was extremely calm and peaceful at this time. She urged us to go and get some rest.

We went a couple blocks down the street to a motel to get some sleep. At eight o'clock in the morning, the telephone rang. It was the hospital calling to inform us Karen had taken a turn for the worse. We were at her bedside in 20 minutes. She was now on all the life support systems, struggling for every breath. I took her hands and said, "Karen, let's pray one more time." After a brief but intense prayer, the doctor said, "You'd better step out. We will have to insert a tube in her lungs."

Back in the waiting room, I prayed "Oh God, please don't let her suffer like that any more. Please don't allow her to suffer. If You're going to heal her, touch her and bring her through this crisis. If You're going to allow her to go home to heaven, take her from her suffering." It had been so horrible to see her fighting for every breath. I am still haunted by her suffering in those last hours of her life.

It was only a few moments after I had whispered that petition to God that the attending physicians entered the room and closed the door. The attending physician looked at us and said, "I'm sorry. We did everything we could, but it wasn't enough. We lost her." He sobbed, embraced Ella Mae, and said, "Please forgive me. I'm sorry."

I discovered in that moment that many of the things we regard as important really did not matter. However, one thing that really counted was the good memories and the good relationship we had enjoyed. We have thought about all the thrills she gave us as we watched her play basketball, softball, and volleyball. All the times she came home skinned up, covered with dirt and blood. She only knew one way to play, and that was all out. The only way she knew how to slide into second base was head first.

We have thought about all the trophies and awards she earned participating in athletics. I have thought about the times we used to jog together and attempt to run a six-minute mile. We had measured off a mile around the church and parsonage. As we approached the last 50 yards, we would race to the finish line. We would run as hard and fast as we could. Sometimes I would win, and sometimes she would win. After finishing the race, we would fall in the yard gasping for breath and enjoy a good laugh together.

We have a number of letters that Karen sent us while she was in college. The last two letters she wrote express the real progress she was making. We will cherish these letters as long as we live.

Several months before Karen graduated, I drove a number of miles out of my way to stop by the campus and take her to supper. She was going through a difficult time, and I wanted to give her support and encouragement. After enjoying supper together, I took her back to the dorm. I hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, told her I loved her, and I was sure she would make it. I will never forget her smile and words as she said, "I'll make it, Dad, because I'm made of good

stuff.” I will always cherish those few hours together and the comments she made. We have been greatly comforted by the good memories and the love we shared.

We are also comforted by the hope we have in the resurrection. We will see her again. We have wept, and we have hurt but not like those who have no hope. The hope we have takes the awful sting out of death.

It is hard to comprehend what it would be like not to have hope. I thought of this in relationship to our mission fields and those out there who also have sorrow, but they do not know about Jesus. They have no hope. No one has ever told them about Jesus. They do not know that He conquered the grave and took the sting out of death.

I am grateful that somebody cared enough to tell me the story of Jesus. It has sustained and strengthened us and brought us through these difficult days. It has indeed helped us in our perspective and values. As we look at life, it will always look a bit different. Thank God for the hope we have of a better day!

“Father, help me to learn everything from this experience You want me to learn. May it enable me to be a better person and a stronger Christian than ever before.”