

TRUE BLUE

BY

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A FIRESIDE TALK

It was Sabbath evening in December. A flurry of snow had announced the coming of winter. The fields were white; the night was cold; the wind moaned beneath the eaves of the plain country home; but inside, kindness and comfort abounded; there Jesus was loved and honored.

The family had worshipped that day in a little Covenanter church on the hillside. After dinner the hours passed slowly, being mostly spent in devotional reading, memorizing and reciting Psalms and catechizing the children. Evening drawing on, the chores were done; and now all had gathered into the living room in front of the cheerful open fire, for a free exchange of thought, which was their custom. Then followed family worship.

There were seven of them; Argyle and Nancy, the father and mother, and five children;—George Wishart, 18; Margaret Willson, 16; Andrew Melville, 13; Isabel Allison, 10; and a little baby brother, sweetly sleeping in its crib beside the mother.

The babe had been baptized that day and had received the name of an honored Covenanter martyr, Richard Cameron. The names of the children showed clearly the devotion of the parents to the Covenanter Church, and their confidence that it would last at least another generation. The conversation that evening naturally turned upon little Richard and the martyrs of Scotland. The talk began with mingled emotions and proceeded in the following manner:

Father—(Looking seriously into the face of the mother) Nancy, this evening I am both happy and anxious. This has been a great day for us; the Lord has been very gracious; his love is wonderful.

Mother—I, too, am happy, Argyle, very happy. But why should we be anxious? Jesus has said, "Be not anxious." My husband, have you forgotten? I would like to hear your happy thoughts first.

Father—I am happy, because this day we gave our fifth child to the Lord in the sacrament of baptism and in the bond of our covenant. What an inheritance! what a birthright! Our dear children are born heirs to the blessings and privileges of the covenant; and we have in the presence of

the congregation and of heaven dedicated them to the Lord. As I think of this my heart praises the Lord.

Mother—I am with you, my husband, in this great happiness. My soul sings for joy as I look upon the faces of these young Covenanters, growing up under our care. May the Lord give them grace to excel their parents in every good work. But, Argyle, why are you anxious?

Father—I am anxious for these precious children. How they will be tried and tempted by the world, the flesh and the devil! Will they endure to the end? What if they break their covenant with God! Can we do any thing more than we are doing to make them strong in Jesus and in His covenant? This makes me anxious. And some of them will soon be leaving home.

Mother—With the help of God we will train them while they are with us; pray for them; set them an example; strive to inspire them to a high life of faith and holy ambition in Jesus. But by all means, Argyle, let us not be anxious. You know anxiety is weakness; our weakness will weaken our children.

Wishart—(Already chafing under covenant restraints) Father, all this talk I suppose is proper; but to be candid, it is getting on my nerves.

Father—My son, I am sorry you feel that way. But I like your candor in speaking out as you do. Now tell us your trouble.

Wishart—Father, I am thinking about these covenant obligations and am puzzled. How can a baby, like our Richard, be put by his parents under obligations? Is it right to impose an obligation when it cannot be understood? I suppose you did the same with me when I was baptized. Now I have come to the time when I must study the question for myself and decide upon my own course of action. Am I not right?

Mother—(Somewhat amazed) My son, *Wishart*, your little brother has been born in the covenant and under covenant obligations; and to day God heard, and you heard, our vow to bring him up in the covenant. *Wishart*, I would rather have your little brother shut out of our home while we enjoy its comforts, than shut out of the covenant while we enjoy its blessings.

Wishart—Mother, I did not mean to vex you. I am not yet set on any course of action. However I am sure that in the end I must decide and act for myself. In the day of Judgment I will find no one to stand up and answer for me. Father, am I correct?

Father—My son, I am glad you keep your eye on the Judgment. The final Judgment makes the path of duty clear. I am happy also to know that you are studying up this important question.

Wishart—Father, I would like to have a direct answer to this question, How was I put under obligations when I was but a baby?

Father—That is a fair question. We go to the Word of God for the answer. There we find that this is simply God's own method of dealing with children. When God made a covenant with Abraham, was not Isaac his son included, though he was not yet born?

Wishart—Yes, but I do not see how, nor why. Will you explain?

Father—Another example may show why; and we will do well to leave the how with

the Lord. When Israel was groaning under the Egyptian bondage, God heard their cry, and remembered His covenant with Abraham, and hastened to the rescue. Do you see how the children of Abraham were helped by the covenant of their father?

Wishart—Yes; in that light the covenant is a channel of blessings rather than a burden of obligations.

Father—My son, you have caught the idea. Your thought is a vision. The blessings are a hundred times greater than the obligations. In fact the obligations merely place us where God can do His most and best for us. Children are born in the covenant just because it is God's merciful method. Is it not a beautiful method?

Mother—Is it not perfectly lovely of Jesus to include the children in the covenant? His heart is too kind to leave them out in the cold.

Wishart—Then really we are in the covenant without our consent. I am not able to see how that is fair.

Father—It is God's way; his beautiful way; and God the Judge of all the earth will never do any thing but what is fair and right.

Wishart—Father, will you explain why so many who leave the Covenanter Church are happy to tell that they were born Covenanters? Do they carry the blessings with them?

Father—To an extent. But the secret of the Christian's joy and strength is found in his relation to God in Jesus Christ. Now let me ask you this question. If he violate his agreement with God, can he have full heartiness and happiness in God's presence? If you break an important promise with a person, does it not take nerve to meet that person, and to put on an appearance just as if you were true and upright as formerly?

Mother—Wishart, I hope you are not growing dissatisfied with the Covenanter Church. Are you really thinking of leaving?

Wishart—No, my dear mother; nor can I say that I am fully satisfied. My mind is not yet determined. But must I stay in the church just because I happened to be born in it? or because my parents are in it? Should I not have better reasons?

Mother—Wishart, the reasons you have mentioned are not sufficient in themselves. But if by study and prayer you find no

other church more true to Jesus and His Word, stay where you are. The covenant and its blessings are yours while you are faithful. And I reveal to you my heart this night, when I say, that I would rather give up my home and the last dollar we have on earth, than give up my covenant heritage and break my promise with Jesus, whose heart was pierced for me, that my heart might be true to Him.

Wishart—Well, as we have gone into this subject to night, I want you to know my deepest thoughts; I will keep nothing back.

Father—My son, tell us all; we will be better able to give you counsel. You have not been as long as we in this world. We can speak from experience and may save you from many mistakes and regrets; we have been up against the world and know what it is.

Wishart—Father, just a side remark; I think I have heard you say, "A Covenanter once, a Covenanter for ever." Am I correct?

Father—I think you are; at least that is a motto I rather like.

Wishart—Father, I think your motto gets some hard knocks from the numbers that are steadily leaving the old church. Besides to my ear it sounds too much like the Romanists, who say, "A Catholic once, a Catholic for ever;" and the Masons, who say, "A Mason once, a Mason always."

Father—Son, you place us in rather unpleasant company as Covenanters. However, the same rule applies to all. If Catholicism be right in the light of God's Word, Catholics should stick to their church; if wrong, they should leave. So with Masonry; so with the Covenanter Church. If you carefully compare the Covenanter Church with the requirements of the Bible and find her to be right, my dear son, stay; if you find her to be wrong, go.

Mother—Argyle, I am afraid you are giving our son encouragement to leave the church. He is already halting between two opinions. In dealing with this question, and with the Lord in this question, I am sure there is only one safe way. There is the covenant; it may be kept, or it may be broken. But God assures us that the covenant-breaker has no easy road to travel.

Father—Nancy, I am not much afraid of Wishart going. My anxiety is fast leaving me. Wishart is thinking; there is hope where there is thought. I have been myself where our son now is. In my early days I tried hard to argue myself out of the Covenanter Church, to get into a larger, looser, more popular church. The more I debated with my heart, the stronger my bonds grew. Now I am so glad I did not get away.

Wishart—Father, I would like a direct answer to this question: Must not I decide for myself, independent of my parents, or friends, or even my minister? Yes, or No.

Father—My son, I do not hesitate to answer, Yes. Some day you will stand before God to give account of yourself, for yourself, and by yourself. But if you be wise, you will heed your mother's advice, and consult your minister.

Wishart—O, I know already what they will say. Now another question, If I decide upon a change, should I not follow my convictions?

Father—Not immediately. First, study your motives; question your heart. The Bible says, "The heart is deceitful." Let it not deceive you. Investigate your reason

for the change, your intention, your expectation. Are you moved by the spirit of self-denial, self-sacrifice, consecration to God, a desire to glorify Jesus? God looks upon the heart.

Wishart—To be candid with you, father, I intend to vote when I am of age. Now will you tell me in a few plain words, why Covenanters cannot vote like other decent people?

Father—Yes, I can tell you. Because Jesus has been excluded from the American government. He is the Governor of the world, yet no place has been found for Him in the government of our country. Is not that a sufficient reason? How can you be faithful to Jesus, and be active in a government that has no use for Him.

Wishart—But I would vote on principle for the best man. The rascals must be kept out of office by putting good men in. Is that not right?

Father—That is what all the Covenanters say, who leave the church to vote. But they have not been very successful in keeping the rascals out. Besides, if your vote puts a good man in office, he must do his work there independent of Jesus. Is that

not embarrassing to say the least? Jesus says, "Without me ye can do nothing."

Wishart—But after all, may not the man who is elected be a Christian and render good service to his country?

Father—Yes; but what do you think of a Christian, who in his official oath appeals to God for help to work independent of Jesus Christ? That is what it amounts to under our present Constitution.

Wishart—Father, nearly everybody votes. Are the Covenanters right on this question, and all others wrong?

Father—The majority, my son, proves no question to be right or wrong. In the days of Moses, two men, Caleb and Joshua, stood against a whole nation; and the two were right. Covenanters have a conscience enlightened with the Word of God; they stand for what they believe to be right at any sacrifice; their forefathers suffered death for these same principles. The Covenanters are sincere before God and man. They inquire not after majorities, but after righteousness. The love of Jesus is their supreme passion; and their loyalty to their country cannot be disputed.

Wishart—Father, to come down to brass tacks; If all good people would stop voting, like the Covenanters, would not our government be in a plight?

Father—My son, let me answer by asking you a question. Is it ever right to do wrong?

Wishart—I'm stuck; the question is too hard for me.

Father—Then I will reply to yours. We are in this world to do right, and only right; to obey God, preserve a pure conscience, keep ourselves unspotted from the world; remembering that Jesus has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and never gives permission to wallow in the mire; and let come what will, God in His providence will keep things under control. *Wishart*, when you begin to truckle with right, in order to do some good thing, you will surely make a mess of it.

Wishart—Father, is not your plan just another way of looking out for Number One? Take care of self; let go the others. Instead of giving up and pulling out, should we not take part and help?

Father—My son, Number One is not in the Covenanters' creed. Covenanters do

not pull out, nor stand back. Though they do not vote, they serve their country. Voting is not the only service; nor the most important. Suffrage we know is an inestimable right and should always be used, if the use does not involve in sin. Yet it does not take much character, nor intelligence, nor even patriotism in our country to qualify for voting. The low and the vile can vote. You should not think that a man who votes is doing the great thing; and the Covenanter who does not vote is doing nothing.

Wishart—Father, in the Sabbath School lesson lately, did we not hear Paul say, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved?"

Father—Yes, my son; but that has no application here. Covenanters abide in the ship. They are in their country's service heart and hand; none more anxious for their nation's welfare; none more self-sacrificing for their country. The late war proved this. How Covenanter sons and daughters rushed into over-sea service! How the old and young wrought at home! How the church gave her prayers, her sermons, and her money with unlimited heartiness! The Editor of the Christian Nation, calling the attention of the government to this feature, and showing indis-

putable evidence by means of the Covenanter Service Flag, which he had carefully prepared, received a grateful reply. And the government itself recognized the loyalty and sacrifice of Covenanters, and showed appreciation by placing that flag permanently on public exhibition, as one of the trophies in the National Museum, thus conferring upon the Covenanter Church an exceptional honor. My son, perish the thought that Covenanters are doing nothing for their country.

Mother—Argyle, I want to say that I rather sympathize with Wishart. Not that I want to vote, or want to see him voting, while our Constitution has no regard for Jesus. But I have recently passed through the same experience. When women were granted the right of suffrage, I was strongly tempted to vote. I felt that I could not refrain on the mere ground of church tradition or usage. I had to reason it out for myself. I had a hard struggle, yet came out on the right side. And now I would rather lose this, my right hand, than have it cast a vote that would slight my Saviour, whose hands were pierced for me, that I might be saved.

Margaret—(All the while listening intently) Mother, the voting fever has not

struck me yet; it may later. May I tell you what troubles me with the Covenanter Church?

Mother—Yes, my daughter; keep nothing back. You have a perfect right to do your own thinking on church matters and on all other interests. Tell us freely your trouble.

Margaret—I think we are entirely too strict on Psalms and hymns. Some hymns are awfully sweet. Why do we not sing them in the church, and in our home in family worship?

Mother—Yes, Margaret; some of the hymns are very sweet; I love to sing them; but not in the worship of God; because God has given us the Psalms for His praise, but not the hymns.

Margaret—And does not God accept hymns in worship?

Mother—God has not appointed them. Men make them; committees select them; churches adopt them; the people sing them for worship; all this without a divine warrant. Margaret, when you think of this, would you care to offer them to God in praise? Would you not be taking a risk?

Margaret—And is there no risk in singing the Psalms?

Mother—No, if we sing them with the spirit and with the understanding. Every Psalm is God's own. The Psalms are the heart of the Bible; they came from the heart of God; when sung with the heart they find the way back to God's heart. The Psalms always for me.

Margaret—I want to ask father a question.

Father—Daughter, say on. I want you to express yourself freely.

Margaret—Father, I know you like music. Why cannot we have an organ in our church?

Father—For the same reason, my daughter, that your mother has given against the hymns. The apostles organized the gospel church without instrumental music. The services as divinely appointed were plain and spiritual, appealing to the heart, not to the senses.

Margaret—But do not the Psalms, which you like so well, call on us to worship God with the harp, and organ and other instruments?

Father—These Psalms were written during the Old Testament dispensation, when instruments of music and instruments of sacrifice were used in the service of worship. The altar, censer, bullocks, and burnt-offerings are also mentioned. When Christ died and rose again, all these things were left out; nothing remained but the plain, spiritual services revealing Jesus in His finished work, and bringing the people close to God.

Margaret—(With emotion) I like music. I think we ought to have an organ in the church. What a fine programme they have in other churches! Why can we not have a programme? Our church is going down for want of a programme. We have the same thing over, and over, and over;—a short prayer, and a long prayer; four Psalms, with a prosy explanation of one of them; and a long sermon, under which some folk sleep. Father, can we have no improvement? Our church is dying.

Father—My daughter, You speak with emphasis; and you have occasion. Conditions are discouraging. I can scarcely sleep at night for them. But I am sure the programme you suggest will not be a cure. What is the purpose of a church programme?

Margaret—To draw the people to the church, and to please them while there, so that they may come again. That is just what we need; we have no drawing power, and the people will not come.

Father—My daughter, should not the people go to church to worship God?

Margaret—Certainly, father; but we need some thing to get them there.

Father—But if they go for music,—solos, duets, quartets, organ recitals and other attractions on the programme, are they likely to enter into the spirit of worship and find God? Can such an entertainment be counted worship? Will hungry souls be fed on heavenly manna? Paul said he did not conduct worship to please people; that if he had no higher motive, then he was not the servant of Christ. He preached to the conscience; he broke the hard hearts; he drew the hot tears; he brought the people before God; they trembled in the presence of the Almighty; they sought mercy; they found Jesus; and the churches were crowded. The gospel in the first three centuries, when they had neither organs nor hymns, conquered the world. My daughter, what we need is a ministry alive to God, on fire with the

Holy Spirit, and passionately in love with Jesus. Then will our churches be overflowing with eager people and earnest worshippers.

Wishart—Father, I think it is time for me to tell you and mother something that I am sure will please both. You will be glad to know that I stand square with the church on the Lodge question.

Father—My son, it surely is a satisfaction to know that you refuse to put your neck under that galling yoke of bondage.

Mother—Wishart, I am more than delighted. Now I would like to know your reasons.

Wishart—Here they are, mother, in few words. First, I will never make a promise to any set of men, till I know what they expect me to do.

Father—That is true wisdom. Making a promise before you know what it involves is like signing a blank check, and telling the other fellow to fill in and collect.

Wishart—Second, I will never permit my mouth to be pad-locked with an oath or promise of secrecy.

Father—My son, by this you escape worse than highway robbery. The Lodge man may be a Christian, but he is robbed of the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free.

Wishart—Third, The unmanliness of the Lodge is abominable in my eyes. They have the light, they say, and hide it; they distribute their charities among themselves; they exclude the unfortunate from membership; they boost each other into places of preferment and advantage without regard to merit.

Mother—Your opposition to the Lodge my son, is backed up by strong reasons. By the grace of God you are proof against that snare; this gives me great joy. It would break your mother's heart to think of you being a victim of a secret order.

Isabel—Mother is it not my turn now to speak? I, too, would like to say something.

Mother—Yes, my child; let us hear what you have in your heart.

Isabel—Mother, my heart loves the Covenanter Church; I think it is the best in the world.

Wishart—How do you know, sister, when you are so young?

Isabel—I know, for I read, and I listen. We have two books in our bookcase. The Scots Worthies, and The Cloud of Witnesses. I never get tired reading them. How the Covenanters in those times did love Jesus! O, they were so brave! They would rather die than break their covenant; and many of them were killed, just because they would not give up Jesus. George Hislop, a boy about your age, Melville, had to die, just because he was a Covenanter. When the soldiers found him in the field, they stood him off as a mark and lifted up their guns to shoot. He said, "I'm not afraid of your guns; but remember you will be judged by this book," holding up the Bible in his right hand. He fell riddled with their bullets. And I often think of James Guthrie, and Archibald Johnston, and Donald Cargill, and many others.

Wishart—Yes, Isabel; they were good and great in those days. But what about the present crop? I heard a man say, the other day, that the Covenanter Church was like a potato patch; the better part is under the ground.

Isabel—That man didn't know what he was talking about. He had better look out or the better part of him will never get higher than the ground he stands on. These Covenanters are in that glorious company, which, the Bible says, "came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God." But the good ones are not all yet in heaven. Mother, I believe there are loads of Covenanters now who would die rather than break their covenant with Jesus. Don't you think so?

Mother—My daughter, you surely have been reading the martyr books to good purpose. How the Covenanter spirit stirs your young heart! You are a real enthusiast.

Isabel—Mother, I do want to love Jesus, just as those martyrs loved him. I would not care if I had to suffer for him; I think I could do it gladly.

Mother—Melville, my son, are you yet awake?

Melville—Awake, mother! Who could sleep with all this talk going on. I have

been listening to every word; and I have been thinking too.

Wishart—A penny for your thoughts, Melville.

Mother—No, no; Melville has no penny thoughts; his are all golden; yes, the finest of the gold. My son, what have you to say?

Melville—Mother, I am glad that I was born a Covenanter. By the help of Jesus I will live a Covenanter; and by His grace I will die a Covenanter; for I feel that if I went back on Him here, I would be ashamed to look Him in the face in heaven.

Mother—That's the talk, my son, that makes your mother happy.

Melville—Mother, I see no use in wabbling. Wabbling gets you nowhere. The martyrs did not wobble. Andrew Melville, my Andrew Melville, did not wobble. Mother, tell us something about him. I like to hear how he talked to his king.

Mother—Yes, my son; I will tell you. Melville honored his king, yet was not afraid to tell him the truth. One time he went to the king and told him how he was

dishonoring Jesus. The king got angry and said he would hang him. Melville replied, "Your threat means nothing to me; but I want you to understand that Jesus is King in this land, and you are His subject and should obey Him." Melville was not scared; no one could scare him, because he kept so close to Jesus.

Melville—Mother, that was no wabbling. I want to be just like him.

Father—We surely have had a profitable talk this evening; it will be long remembered. God has taken away my anxiety. Our children are thinking, studying and feeling their responsibility. The Lord is guiding them. We must not expect too much all at once. Jesus says, "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Melville, you bring on the books and we will now have family worship.

Wishart—Father, before we quit, may I ask one more question?

Father—Certainly, my son.

Wishart—Do you believe the time will ever come, when the other churches will adopt Covenanter principles and practices?

Father—My son, that is a hard one; but you have a perfect right to raise the question and to expect a candid answer. The Covenanter Church is by no means ideal. She is a standardbearer, but she is not the standard. Just like all the churches, she has many imperfections. But the principles that govern her, and the practices that logically grow out of these principles, will yet prevail over all the world. Of this I am confident as I am that the sun will rise tomorrow morning.

Wishart—Father, why are you so confident? Are you a prophet?

Father—My son, I am no prophet; yet I can have no doubt of the success of Christ's kingdom. These principles, in their simplest form, may be reduced to two: Jesus Christ, the King of the world; and, Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. Will these two facts prevail, so as to bring churches and nations up to God's ideal? I am confident they will. God, the Father, practically says to all the nations, "Bow the knee to Jesus;" and to all the churches, "Worship Him in spirit." To this they must come; otherwise the throne of God is a failure. Will there not be a house-cleaning among the nations, when they all obey Jesus, and in the churches, when

the principle of spiritual worship prevails? I presume that even the Covenanter Church will scarcely know herself, when she is cleansed by the application of her own principles.

Mother—Dear children, your father has been telling us what the Covenanter Church stands for. The martyrs cherished these principles more than their own lives. They suffered that they might leave an inheritance of truth and freedom to their children. The cause was nobly defended, but did not triumph in their day; nor in the next generation. The warfare continues. When they fell, they expected their children to continue the struggle for Jesus. The conflict now is ours. Will we be watchful, active, self-sacrificing? Let us take heed, lest what has been entrusted to us be lost. We are responsible to future generations and to God.

Your father and mother and many others are now growing old and gray. We have been doing the work and bearing the burdens of the Covenanter Church in our day, defending the blood-bought faith, as best we could, for the last thirty or forty years, and we cannot stay much longer. By and by we will hear a voice saying, "Your work is finished; time is up; come home and

get rested." Dear children, will our places then be vacant? I cannot think so. God sparing you, will there not be five consecrated workers rising up in this home, every one of the five true to Jesus and faithful in His covenant till the last breath leaves the body, and the soul ascends to heaven? Will you not step into the conflict and keep in line, willing to suffer rather than yield? The next generation looks to you to save for them the fruits of this long hard warfare. Will you be true to the trust? Dear children, will you be true? The Lord Jesus be with you at every step of the way.

Father—We will now take the books, and, with reverence and godly fear, engage in the worship of God by singing the Twenty-Third Psalm:

The Lord's my Shepherd; I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

This booklet is sent free on application. Our ministers may order for all their families; for others also with discrimination.

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